

WISDOM

OBEDIENCE

Decision making and the will of God

Lessons from the life of Joseph – Part 2

A Family Life Ministry Sermon

1. God's will does not rob us of the freedom to choose.
2. God's will can use evil and suffering to save lives.
3. God's will involves human responsibility.
4. God has a specific life plan for each one of us.

Why the idea of finding God's will is not biblical

- Not explicitly found in the bible
- Biblical narratives used to support this idea (eg:Gideon putting out the fleece) are not normative
- Can be a subtle form of divination
- Inconsistently applied only to certain big decisions in life
- Pattern usually involves self actualization decisions

How then should Christians make decisions?

Common reply:-

- Read your bible intentionally
- Pray fervently over important decisions you need to make
- Seek godly counsel from others
- Take into consideration inner peace, conscience, signs, prompting of the Holy Spirit and confirmation by others (*eg: Paul's response to God providing an open door for him in Troas (2 Cor 2:12-13), or to the prophecy from Agabus to Paul going to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11)*)

³ Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. ⁵ So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also.

⁶ Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked.

"From the land of Canaan," they replied, "to buy food."

⁸ Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. ⁹ Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

Genesis 42:3-9

1. Decisions are often *instinctive*.



2. Our decision making process is often *habitual*.

“We are what we repeatedly do.” Aristotle



3. Due to sin of pride we often make wrong or sinful decisions, *then* justify them.

⁹ I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, **who loves to be first**, will not welcome us. ¹⁰ So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

3 John 9

- Decisions are often instinctive.
- Our decision making process is often habitual.
- Due to sin of pride we often make wrong or sinful decisions, *then* justify them.

Proposition: Sometimes telling people to go read the bible more, pray more and seek godly counsel is not enough to allow them to make godly decisions.

Joseph test his brothers – chapters 42-44

- Single longest narrative in the Joseph account so it is important to understand it.
- Controversial as the testing involves deception on the part of Joseph.
- Repetitions used in the narrative helps us understand what's being emphasized.

How does Joseph tests his brothers?

- Test 1 – Find Ben
- Test 2 – Find Ben, Favor Ben
- Test 3 – Find Ben, Favor Ben, Frame Ben

Test No 1: “Find Ben”

¹⁰ “No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”

¹² “No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

¹³ But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.”

¹⁴ Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies! ¹⁵ **And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here.** ¹⁶ Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!” ¹⁷ And he put them all in custody for three days.

¹⁸ On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹ If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. ²⁰ But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die." This they proceeded to do.

²¹ They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us."

²² Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." ²³ They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

²⁴ He turned away from them and **began to weep**, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

⁵ As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man's sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. ³⁶ Their father Jacob said to them, "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, **and now you want to take Benjamin.** Everything is against me!"

³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back."

³⁸ But Jacob said, "**My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.**"

43 Now the famine was still severe in the land. ² So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food."
³ But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.' ⁴ If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. ⁵ But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'"

⁸ Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. ⁹ I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. ¹⁰ As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice."

¹⁵ So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. ¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal; they are to eat with me at noon."

¹⁷ The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸ Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, "We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys."

¹⁹ So they went up to Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. ²⁰ "We beg your pardon, our lord," they said, "we came down here the first time to buy food. ²¹ But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. ²² We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks."

²³ "It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

Test 2: “Find Ben, Favor Ben”

²⁹ As he looked about and *saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.”* ³⁰ *Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.*

³¹ *After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, “Serve the food.”*

³² *They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians.* ³³ *The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment.* ³⁴ *When portions were served to them from Joseph's table, **Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's.** So they feasted and drank freely with him.*

Test 3: “Find Ben, Favor Ben, Frame Ben”

44 Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. ² Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said.

¹⁴ Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, “What is this you have done? Don’t you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?”

¹⁶ “What can we say to my lord?” Judah replied. “What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.”

How does Joseph tests his brothers?

- Test 1 – Find Ben
- Test 2 – Find Ben, Favor Ben
- Test 3 – Find Ben, Favor Ben, Frame Ben
- Test 4 – Find Ben, Favor Ben, Frame Ben, *Forget Ben- free yourselves*

Test 4: “Find Ben, Favor Ben, Frame Ben, Forget Ben, free yourselves”

¹⁷ But Joseph said, “Far be it from me to do such a thing! *Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave.* The rest of you, go back to your father in peace.”

Note: If the brothers take this deal Jacob’s family will become destitute due to the famine but Benjamin will be free. But they do not know this.

Judah's response: "Free Ben. I will take his place."

³⁰ "So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, ³¹ sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. ³² Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!'"

³³ "Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. ³⁴ How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father."

Repentance, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Salvation

⁴⁵ Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² **And he wept so loudly** that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

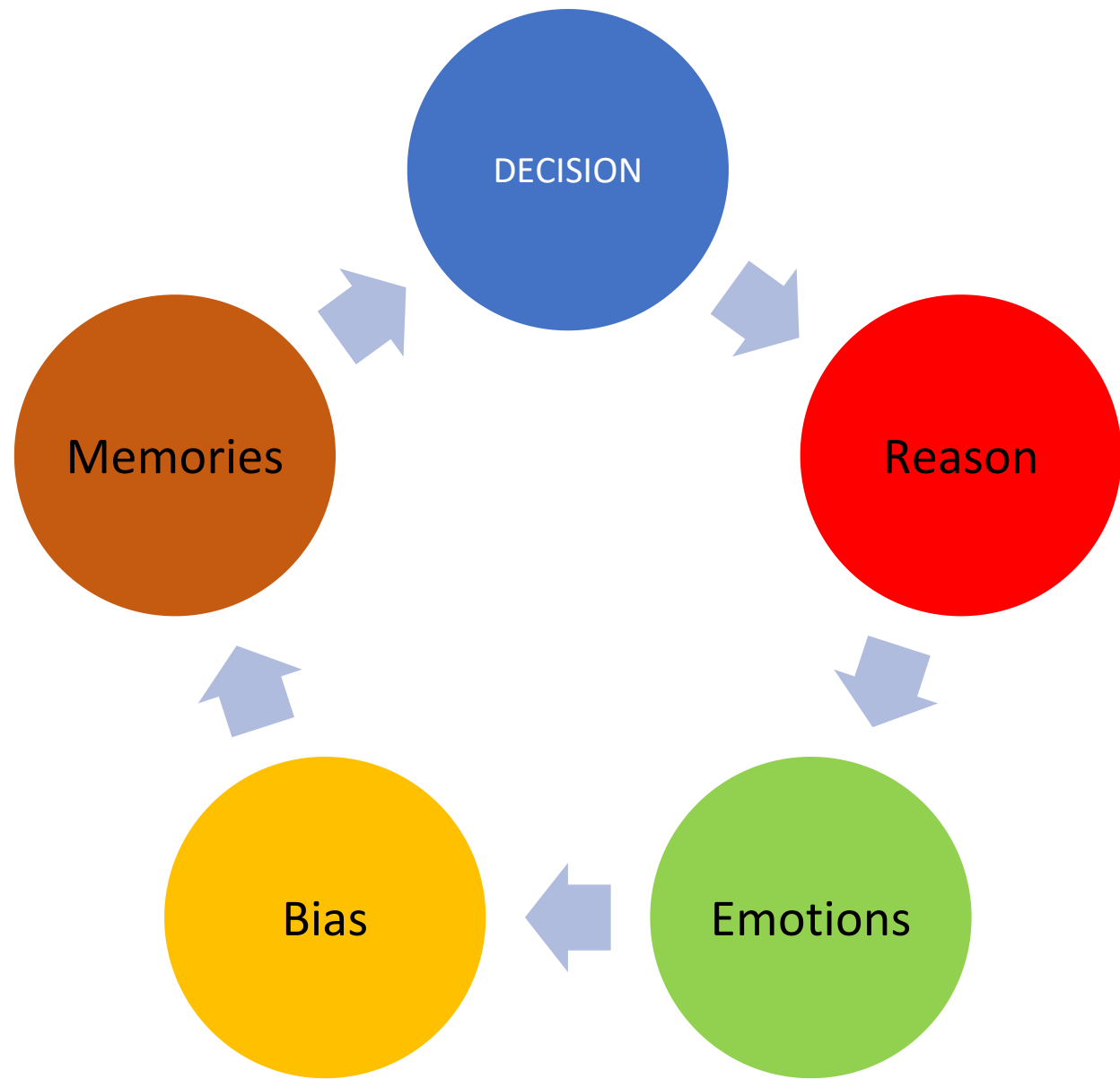
⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

Joseph's decision making process

- He overcame his initial **biasness** against his brothers for what they did to him with eventual grace and forgiveness.
- He **reasoned** carefully to test his brothers – he conducted 4 tests before revealing himself to them.
- He controlled his **emotions** throughout the entire duration of testing.
- He did not allow the **memories** of what his brothers did to push him into acts of revenge.

When making a decision, we form opinions and choose actions via mental processes which are influenced by **biases, reason, emotions, and memories**. The simple act of deciding supports the notion that we have free will. We weigh the benefits and costs of our choice, and then we cope with the consequences.

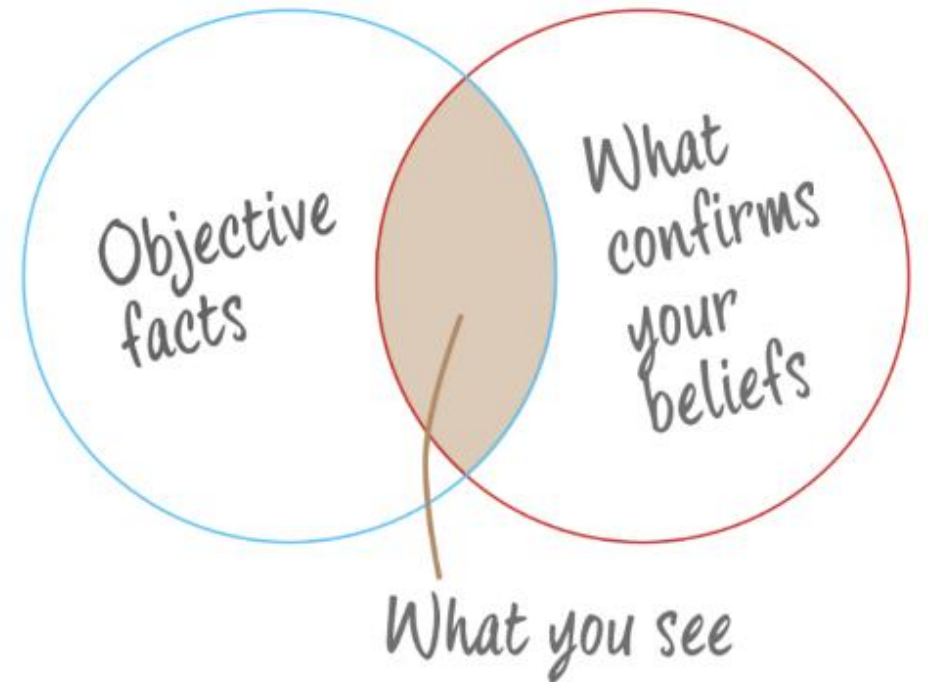
Psychology Today



1. Is your decision making *process* God honoring?

- How **bias** are you?
- Have you **reasoned** carefully?
- Do you let your **emotions** control your decisions?
- How do your **memories** affect your decisions?

Proposition: We are often told we need to live a life of obedience, but we are not told enough how to do so.

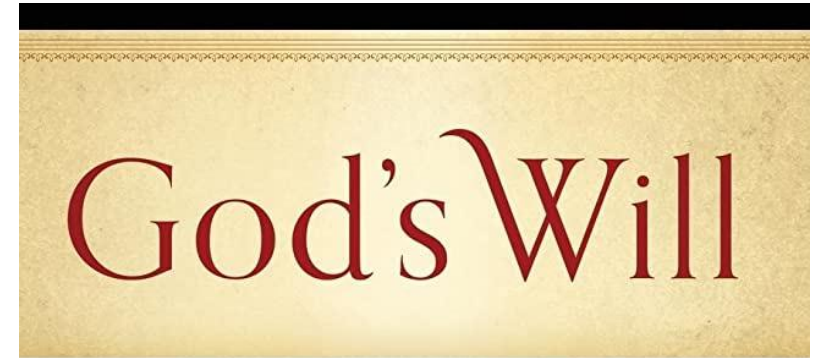


Decisions are often habitual and instinctive.

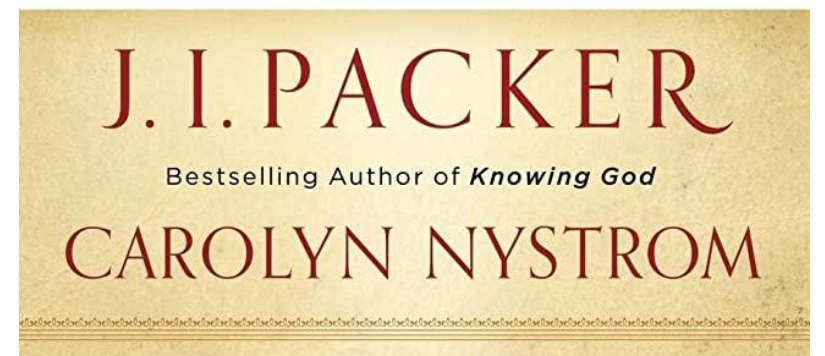
When making decisions are you-

- **Indecisive**
- **Impulsive**
- **Inflexible**
- **Inconsistent**
- **“Lalang”**
- **Follow the crowd**
- **Careless**
- **Procrastinating**
- **Over analyzing**
- **Fearful (*decision paralysis*)**
- **Get anxious and have panic attacks when pressured to make decision**

Adapted and modified from JI Packer’s book “God’s Will”

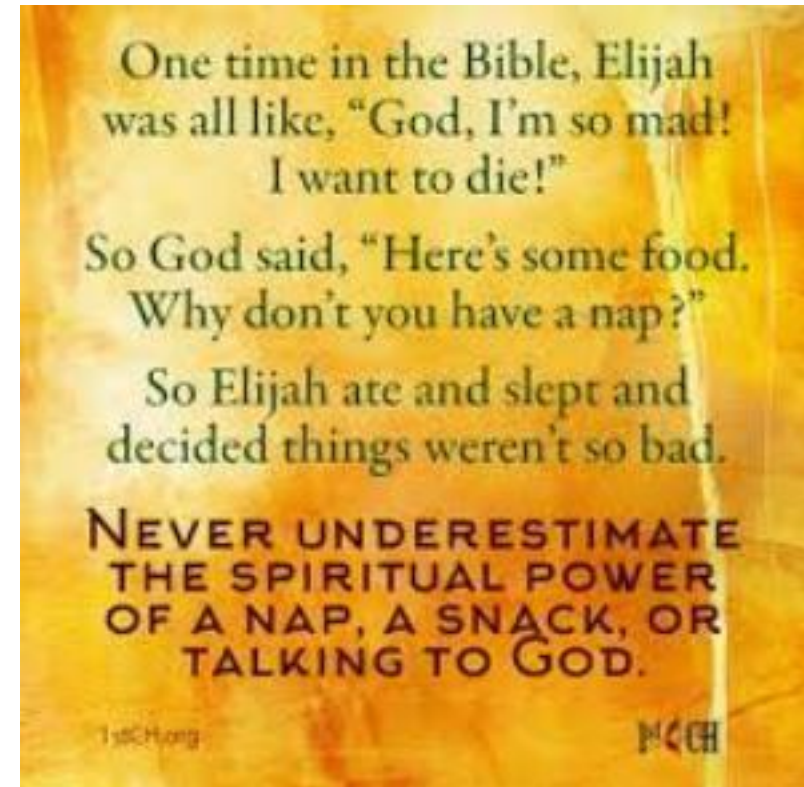


Finding Guidance
for Everyday Decisions



2. Develop godly habits that will shape your decision making process

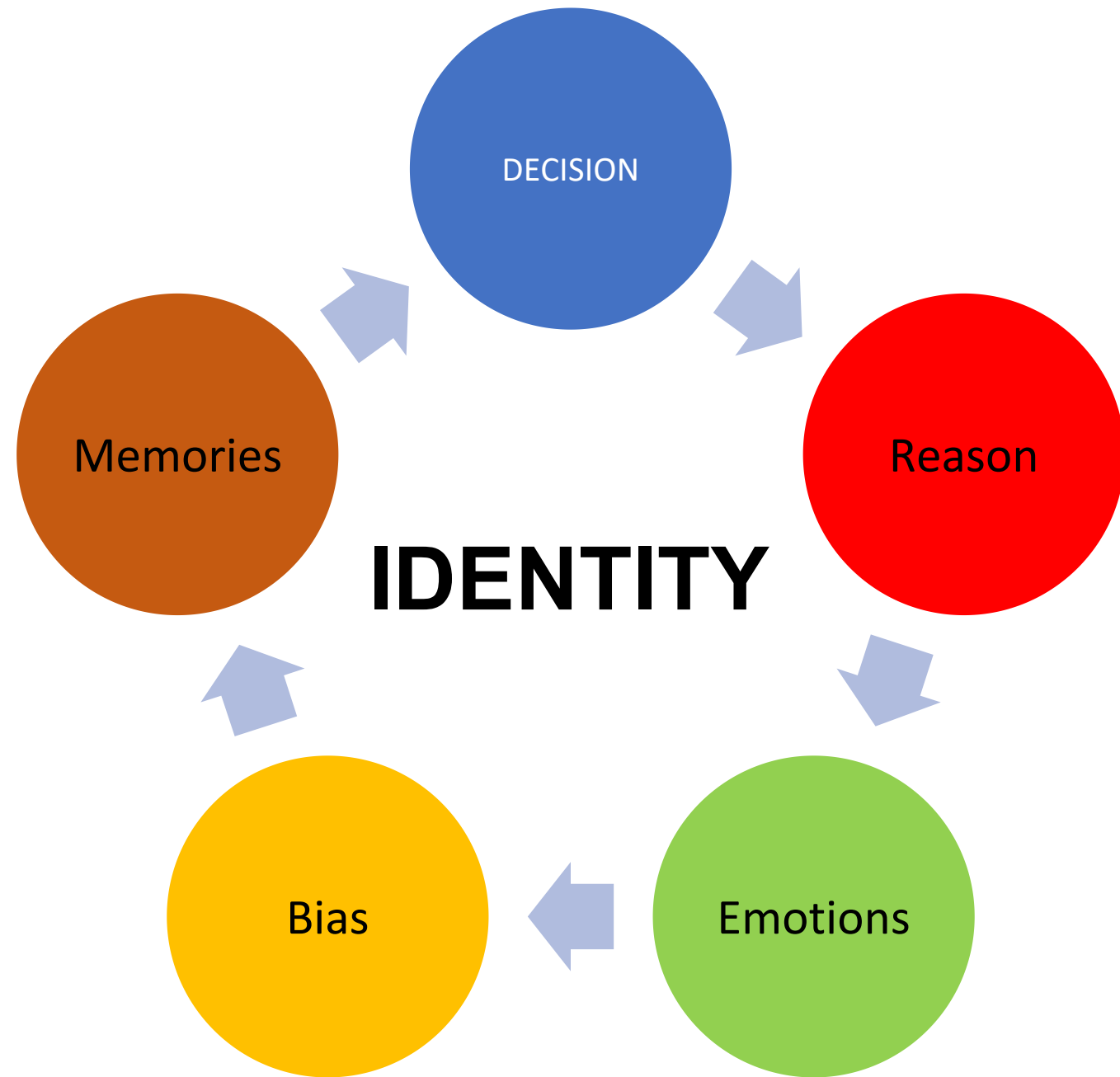
- How does your *daily routine* affect your decision making process?
- How do you *practice* praying for wisdom and discernment?
- Are you willing to have *difficult discussions* with others that will challenge your narratives of events?



- How **bias** are you?
- Have you **reasoned** carefully?
- Do you let your **emotions** control your decisions?
- How do your **memories** affect your decisions?
- **Who do you think you are** at the moment you make that decision?

3. Identity reinforcement shapes godly decision making

45 ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.



What would you decide today?

- If Joseph can decide to forgive his brothers for selling him into slavery what does it say about us?
- If Judah was prepared to be a slave to save Benjamin what does it say about us?