

How to Fix Bad Decisions

I recently did a blog post called "8 Keys to Finding God's Will For Your Life." That post covered the big questions regarding God's will, and it was intended to help people understand God's calling for their lives, particularly in how it relates to ministry and vocation. I then followed up with another post called "How to Make Right Decisions." That post offered a different slant on following God's will. In particular, it brought it down to the day-to-day decisions we have to make that all add up to fulfilling God's will overall.

I hope those posts were helpful to some. However, I do realize that a key question that comes up when addressing this issue is, "OK, so what do I do if I've already messed up? How do I fix a bad decision?" With this question in mind, I wanted to offer help for those times when we realize we've blown it.

How to Fix a Bad Decision

The first step is to answer the following question:

Was this bad decision a morally bad decision (right vs. wrong), or was it just a stupid bad decision? The way you deal with the bad decision will vary depending on your answer to that important question.

How to Fix a Morally-Bad Decision

1) Confess it to God.

1 John 1:9

The first step to fixing a sinful mistake is to confess it directly to God. By "confess," I mean that you should agree with God about how bad it was and ask Him to forgive you for what you did. Amazingly, once we confess our sins to God, He will cast them as far as the east is from the west, and He will remember them no more.

2) Stop doing that bad thing.

Proverbs 28:13

It's one thing to confess your sin, and it is another thing to forsake your sin. You must do everything you can to turn away from that sin. This begins with an utter commitment to do whatever it takes to change.

3) Wrap your head around everything God has said about that issue in the Scriptures.

Joshua 1:8

You must learn everything you can about what God has to say about that sinful mistake you have made. When you learn His thoughts, you will begin to pave a path away from that sin and toward restoration. But you just can't wing it. You must study the Scriptures to know God's heart on that

issue.

4) Ask for forgiveness from any who were hurt because of your bad decision.

Matthew 5:23-24

When we sin, we often hurt others. Sometimes we don't even realize how badly we've hurt others while we are amid the sin. So, take time to look around and take an honest look at what harm you may have caused others. Then, go to those you have hurt and apologize and do whatever you can to fix that hurt. You may not be able to fix it completely, and they may not even forgive you. But you need to do all that is within your power to make it right.

5) Set up guardrails in your life that will help you keep from doing that again.

Proverbs 27:12

Proverbs 26:11

We all have sinful desires, and so we must establish guardrails that will keep us from careening off the road spiritually and wiping out in sin. If you struggle with Internet sin, then enlist an accountability partner who can monitor your online activity. If you struggle with anger, then enlist an accountability partner (a godly friend) who will lean into you to help you do right and correct you when you do wrong. Set up boundaries that will make it impossible for you to do that wrong thing even if you wanted to do that.

6) Seek godly counsel for solutions in getting back on track.

Proverbs 11:14

We all need people to speak into our lives to give us a fresh perspective on how to fix our problems. None of us can solve all of our problems alone. When you find godly advisors who can help to guide you, you will be amazed at how great ideas they can come up with at times that will help you to find victory. They will see things that you cannot see yourself. It's sort of like you're walking around with a "kick me" sign on your back. Others can see it, but you cannot. A godly counselor can help to remove it from your back.

7) Surround yourself with a godly support system that will help you to do right.

Hebrews 3:13

In addition to one or two close advisors, you need a whole network of Christian friends who can help you to do right in your life. And the best places to find these close friends will be at church, small group Bible studies, and when you get involved in ministry. These relationships will make a huge difference in strengthening you and helping you to stay on the right path.

8) Make a long-term commitment to change.

Matthew 16:24-26

To change, you must be committed to the long term. Plenty of people get into trouble in their lives and show up at church to find a “quick fix.” But then you often see those people fade away after just a few weeks or months. They return to the same old paths of sin that got them into trouble in the first place. So, upfront, you must understand that this is a long-term commitment, and you must be committed to changing over the long haul. The Christian life is not a sprint; it is a marathon.

But what if the bad decision you made was not necessarily sinful, but it was just stupid?

How to Fix a Stupid Decision:

1) Take full responsibility.

Proverbs 28:13

If you made a mistake, own it. Don't explain it away, minimize it, or shift the blame to others. Just admit that you blew it, and take full responsibility. If you fail to own it, then others will question your integrity, and your problems will mount. It takes guts and true character to admit when you've made a mistake.

2) Wrap your head around everything God has said about this specific issue.

Joshua 1:8

The principles of God's Word are miraculously able to help you navigate the paths of life, so take advantage of that treasure trove of wisdom. Saturate your mind with God's very own thoughts. Allow His thoughts to become your thoughts. The principles of God's Word will guide you in getting things back on track.

3) Work to understand fully what it was that went wrong.

Proverbs 10:23

It's one thing to make a mistake. And it's another thing to make the same mistake over and over and over, week after week after week. To stop the cycle, you must take time to stop, evaluate your situation, and figure out what it was that went wrong. Do everything you can to gain knowledge and understanding that will prevent you from making the same mistake repeatedly.

4) Stop doing the stupid thing (if possible).

Proverbs 26:11

It may seem odd to have to make this point, but... you need to stop doing that thing that has gotten you into trouble. The reason I'm making this point is that I have counseled too many people to count over the years who have recognized that they've made a bad decision, but then they go on to do it over and over again. So, stop doing that stupid thing. This means making a COMMITMENT to putting it to an end. You've got to want to stop it so badly that you will do whatever is required of you to forge a new path. Make that commitment right now!

5) Ask for forgiveness from anyone you may have hurt by your bad decision.

Matthew 16:24-26

Even though your bad choice may not have been sinful, it still may have been hurtful to others. If so, do what you can to rebuild those relationships. Humbly take responsibility and ask for forgiveness. Don't add any qualifiers to your apology. In other words, don't say, "I'm sorry I did that, but...." Just apologize and ask them to forgive you for blowing it.

6) Do whatever you can to offer restitution to anyone you have hurt by your bad decision.

Exodus 22

The Bible speaks of confession and forgiveness, but it also speaks much of restitution. If your mistake has caused a loss for others, then it is your responsibility to repay that loss. And if the loss is not a tangible loss that can be quantified, you need to do whatever you can to fix the problem you have caused. This is difficult at times, but it is the right thing to do. And God will bless you greatly when you pay restitution to those you have harmed.

7) Seek wise counsel to help you formulate a solid solution. (Formulate a "board of directors" for your life.)

Proverbs 11:14

1 Corinthians 15:33

I highly recommend that you find several godly advisors who will sort of act like a "board of directors" for your life. No, you probably won't conduct annual meetings or hold votes, but these advisors will be your go-to people when you need input for making decisions and resolving problems. These godly friends can help you to make good decisions and help you to resolve problems that arise when you make bad decisions.

8) Create a plan for getting yourself back on track with where you should be.

Proverbs 21:31

Proverbs 16:9

Now it is important to prayerfully establish a plan to get yourself back on track, and then allow God to lead you each step of the way as you move forward within that plan. Determine what the best potential outcome can be considering the circumstances, and then think through the specific steps you will need to take to get to that preferred outcome. Write out those steps, and then assign deadlines for when you plan to complete those steps. Once you have your plan in place, share it with your closest advisors. They can help you greatly by giving you additional input and by holding you accountable for sticking to your plan.