

WISDOM

GOD'S VISION FOR LIFE

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Thomas Smith and Jeff Cavins

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Welcome to *The Great Adventure*

*“To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances;
to seek him, the greatest adventure.” – St. Augustine*

The Bible is at the heart of our Catholic Faith—and our relationship with God. It is the living Word of God, where our Father meets with us and lovingly speaks to us. Reading the Bible should bring us closer to Christ, but understanding it is not always easy. Many people tell us they have tried time and again to prayerfully read Scripture, but they get frustrated because they “just don’t get it.”

The Great Adventure is designed so that anyone can make sense of the Bible and experience the life-changing power of God’s Word. At the core of *The Great Adventure* is the concept that there is a story running through the seventy-three books of the Bible that ties all of Scripture together and makes sense not just of the Bible, but of our lives as well.

That story is God's plan as it has unfolded throughout salvation history and continues to unfold today. Once we grasp this "big picture," the readings at Mass begin to make more sense, our Scripture reading and study come to life, and we see how our lives fit into God's loving plan.

Hundreds of thousands of participants have discovered the riches of Scripture by experiencing one or more *Great Adventure* Bible studies. It is our prayer that you will gain a newfound understanding of God's Word that will transform your life and bring you closer to Christ.

Jeff Cavins, Creator & President,
The Great Adventure

Sarah Christmyer, Co-developer & Author,
The Great Adventure

About The Great Adventure Catholic Bible Study Program

At the core of *The Great Adventure* is *The Bible Timeline Learning System*: a simple way to get the “big picture” of the Bible by focusing on the story that runs throughout Sacred Scripture. *Great Adventure* Bible studies explore the biblical narrative in light of Catholic teaching and the historical, cultural, and literary context of the Scriptures in order to discover what Scripture reveals about God’s plan and our place within it. Studies of individual books of the Bible are supplemented by thematic and “life application” studies.

Every *Great Adventure* study is designed to foster:

- Familiarity with the Bible and ease of reading it
- Bible study habits consistent with the guidelines of the Catholic Church
- Personal engagement in the Word of God
- Faith-sharing based on the Word of God
- Growth in knowledge about Scripture and the Catholic Faith

About *Wisdom: God's Vision for Life*

In everything from friendships to finances, making decisions to attaining peace of mind, Scripture offers a vision for happiness and well-being. Drawing on the “wisdom literature” of the Bible—Proverbs, Wisdom, Sirach, Ecclesiastes, Job, and the Wisdom Psalms—*Wisdom: God's Vision for Life* provides sound guidance on attaining wisdom.

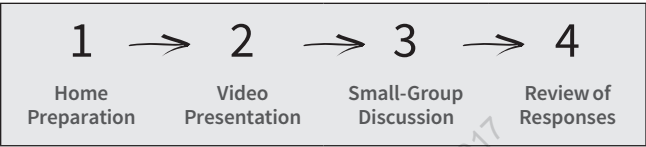
Materials

- **The Journal** – Contains home reading assignments, engaging study questions, pages for *lectio divina*, talk notes for the video presentations, and responses to the questions. (*You will need one Journal for every participant, study leader, and small-group facilitator.*)
- **Video Presentations** (eight 30-minute sessions) – Presented by Jeff Cavins and other experts, these video presentations will help participants learn how to gather, gain, and grow in wisdom and experience the joy it brings to their lives. (*You will need one DVD Set.*)

In addition, every participant, leader, and small-group facilitator should have a Catholic Bible. We recommend the Revised Standard Version–Catholic Edition (RSV-CE).

How the Study Works

Every session in this *Great Adventure* study includes four essential steps, which are designed to fit together and build upon each other. Following these steps in order will allow you to get the most out of each session.



Step 1: Home Preparation

Note: There is no home preparation for Session One.

Each session in the journal begins with personal study on “Learning Wisdom” and “Living Wisdom.” In these sections, you will read Scripture passages and answer a series of questions to help you understand and think more deeply about what you have read. Some questions will include additional reading from other parts of the Bible or from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) to help you consider the passage in light of the bigger picture of salvation history and Catholic teaching. We suggest that home preparation be done in several sittings over the course of a week. This will help you create a habit of daily Bible reading and prayerful meditation.

Each session of this study also includes a four-page “*Lectio with Wisdom*” section. Participants are invited to take four days during the week to meditate on the passages provided using the ancient prayer method of *lectio divina*. The steps of *lectio divina* are outlined on page 8.

Step 2: Video Presentation (30 minutes)

Each weekly session will begin with a video presentation featuring Jeff Cavins and other experts. These videos offer unique insights and profound connections that will help you gain a deeper understanding of the Bible’s wisdom literature and its relationship to the Catholic Faith and your life.

Step 3: Small-Group Discussion (45-60 minutes)

One of the richest parts of a *Great Adventure* Bible study is the small-group discussion. During this discussion, you and the other members of your small group will have the opportunity to review and discuss your responses to the questions and share the insights you gained from your *lectio divina* time and the video presentation.

This small-group discussion will allow you to obtain a richer understanding of the readings and help you apply them to your life. Trained facilitators guide the small-group discussions and keep them on track. Be sure to follow the “Ten Commandments of a Small-Group Discussion” on page xvi.

Step 4: Review of Responses

The final step—reviewing the responses at the back of this journal—is done at home after the session and prior to beginning the reading for the next session. These responses will help you read the Scripture passages for the next session in the proper context.

For the richest study experience, complete these steps in order: (1) Read and answer the questions; (2) view the video presentation; (3) discuss your responses to the questions in your small group; and (4) review the responses.

For more information about how to plan and promote a Bible study and how to facilitate a small-group discussion, visit **BibleStudyForCatholics.com/leaders**, or call our Study Consultants at 1-800-376-0520.

Session Outline and Reading Guide

Each session in this journal has the following sections. (*Note: The Introduction follows a different format.*)

1. **Session Questions** (used during **Step 1: Home Preparation** and **Step 3: Small-Group Discussion**)
 - Introduction
 - Learning Wisdom
 - Living Wisdom
 - *Lectio* with Wisdom
2. **Listening to Wisdom** (talk notes for use during **Step 2: Video Presentation**)
3. **Session Responses** (used during **Step 4: Review of Responses**)

The following chart offers an overview of the main home preparation readings assigned in each session of the study. Additional Bible readings and *Catechism* readings are provided in the questions section of each session and should be read as you answer the questions for that session.

Session	Title	Scripture Readings	CCC Reading
Session One	Introduction	Sirach 1:11-20	—
Session Two	Wisdom in Decision-Making	Sirach 9:14-15, 37:10-12; Proverbs 3:5-6, 3:21-26, 20:14-15; Tobit 4:19; Isaiah 11	CCC 1776–1789, 1831
Session Three	Wisdom in Finances	Proverbs 3:9, 4:10, 13:11, 14:31, 28:27, 29:7; Sirach 3:30-31, 8:12-13, 31:5-7, 40:19-27	CCC 2113, 2172, 2424, 2536
Session Four	Wisdom in Relationships	Proverbs 13:24, 14:26, 19:18, 22:6, 22:15; Sirach 6:5-7, 9:10	—
Session Five	Wisdom for Peace of Mind	Proverbs 19:11, 23:17, 24:1-2, 27:20, 29:11; Sirach 27:30; Wisdom 2:24; Philippians 4:4-9	CCC 2302–2306, 2538–2540
Session Six	Wisdom in Speech	Sirach 4:23-25, 5:10-14, 21:16-17, 28:12-16	CCC 2482–2487
Session Seven	Wisdom in Age	Psalm 78:3-7; 1 Timothy 5:9-10; Titus 2:1-5; Exodus 20:2-17; Sirach 3:1-16, 6:34, 7:27-28; Psalm 71	—
Session Eight	Wisdom in Christ	Matthew 5:21-26, 5:33-37, 6:1-18, 6:9-15, 7:24-27; Ephesians 4:26-27; James 1:19-20; 1 Corinthians 1:18-20	—

What to Do for Each Session

1. Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)
2. Video Presentation (30 minutes)
3. Small-Group Discussion (45-60 minutes)

Note to Study Leaders: During the first meeting, ensure that everyone has the study materials, explain how the study works, and divide participants into small groups of eight to twelve people. Each small group should be led by a trained facilitator. Have the small groups discuss the questions for Session One and read the Scripture passage provided.

4. Closing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Getting the Most Out of This Study

This study will help you understand the Bible in a new way. The “head knowledge” you gain will help you grow in “heart knowledge” as you follow up on what you have learned. The Bible will always remain a mystery, though, and that is part of the beauty of it: We can never exhaust the treasures of Scripture. Fortunately for us, the Bible is not a subject to master; it is a place to encounter the living Word of God.

Whenever you open your Bible to read, *start with prayer*, and place yourself in God's presence. You might take Samuel's prayer as your own: “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening”

(1 Samuel 3:10). When you read, adopt an attitude of listening. Try not to treat Scripture as a text, but as a personal message from God. What is he saying? What does it mean? And what does it mean for your life? If you come to the Word focused on having an encounter with the Lord, he will speak to your heart, and you will be transformed.

Responses to the questions are provided in the back of this journal to help facilitators prepare for the small-group discussion and for participants to review after the meetings. Participants should not review the responses for each session until after the meeting. Although it might be tempting to look at these responses in advance, it is important to wait for the following reasons:

1. Bible study is not about simply watching a video presentation or reading a Bible commentary. It is just as important to immerse yourself in the Word of God itself and engage it with your heart and mind. The questions in *The Great Adventure* studies are designed to draw you into the Scriptures so that the Word of God will be planted and grow in your heart. Reading a response written by someone else may satisfy your mind for a moment, but it will not result in the kind of growth that will occur if you attempt to answer the question on your own first.

2. The success of a small group depends on a good discussion. A group of participants who have spent time pondering the Scripture passages on their own will have more varied insights to discuss.

When you follow the steps of this study as intended, you will explore the Word of God in different ways: in the reading, the video presentation, the small-group discussion, and, finally, in the responses. Follow these steps over time and you will be more than fed; you will learn to feed yourself.

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Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion¹

1. Enjoy yourself!
2. Speak with respect and charity.
3. Do not ridicule or dismiss what others say.
Keep comments positive.
4. Come prepared.
5. If you were not able to prepare, let others speak first.
6. Stick to the topic and questions at hand.
7. Start and end on time.
8. Allow silence. Give people a chance to think.
9. Listen to others without interrupting.
10. Keep personal matters within the group.

¹ Adapted from Thomas Smith's original "10 Commandments of a Small Group."

*“If any of you
lacks wisdom,
let him ask God,
who gives to all men
generously and without
reproaching, and
it will be given him.”*

James 1:5

Session One



Introduction

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Information Overload

Experts estimate that we now have more than 1.3 trillion gigabytes of online information at our fingertips. That's the equivalent of a stack of fully loaded iPads 339 miles high. When information is that ubiquitous, it can begin to consume our lives, giving us "paralysis by analysis." Much of this information is disposable and is forgotten within minutes. So, we may possess more information than ever before while never becoming truly wise.

Divine Data Collection

People in biblical times collected information, too, but it was data of a different kind. They received time-tested knowledge, which, when rightly applied, led to a life of wisdom and happiness.

Biblical wisdom is more than tweet-sized aphorisms or biblical "life-hacks" for practical living. For the authors of the Bible, wisdom was a matter of life and death. It was a carefully learned skill. In fact, the Hebrew word used for "wisdom" in the Old Testament, *chokmah*, was also used to describe the creative gifts of a temple artist (see Exodus 35:31), a skilled sailor (see Psalm 107:27), or a master goldsmith (see Jeremiah 10:9). In each case, these experts first had to

apprentice under a master. They had to learn discipline and accept reproof and correction humbly.

If we want true wisdom, the journey is the same for us (see Proverbs 1:2-6). It requires a willingness to learn, an eagerness of spirit, and a humility of heart (see Proverbs 1:23, 15:33). Are you ready? Let's get started!

Sitting at the Feet of Wisdom

Few of us have the advantage of spending time at the feet of a true spiritual master, but Sacred Scripture gives us that opportunity. Ancient authors collected the greatest wisdom of their times, eventually committing it to written form so that we could hear and benefit from those sages today.

In this study, we will draw from many of the wisdom books of the Old Testament, including Proverbs, Wisdom of Solomon (commonly called the "book of Wisdom"), Sirach, Ecclesiastes, Job, and even the Wisdom Psalms.

Reading Wisdom Literature

The wisdom literature of the Bible is often in the form of proverbs: short, memorable statements, often with a contrasting parallel line. For example, "A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool throws off restraint and

is careless” (Proverbs 14:16). This literary design drives the point home and aids in memorization. Other times, the literature offers practical, godly advice: “The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself; so, you will find favor in the sight of the LORD. For great is the might of the LORD; he is glorified by the humble” (Sirach 3:18-20).

Wisdom literature is based on general principles of living. Individual wisdom sayings do not represent a guarantee or a promise. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Overall, that is true. It should motivate parents to provide a thorough religious education for their children; however, there is no guarantee that your children will follow that instruction throughout their lives. Every human being has free will to choose his or her own destiny. So, we can see that this literature not only *teaches* wisdom but also *requires* some basic wisdom to navigate it successfully. Throughout this eight-part program, we will endeavor to help you do just that.

In this first session, take a moment to introduce yourself to your small group, review the “Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion” on page xvi, and discuss the following questions:

1. What, if any, experience do you have with Old Testament wisdom literature? Have you read or studied it before?

2. Describe a wise person in your life who has helped you with important decisions or difficult situations.

3. What (or who) have been your sources of wisdom in life?

4. Where do most people look for wisdom today?

5. What do you hope to gain from this *Wisdom* study?

6. The Bible repeatedly reminds us that “to fear the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Sirach 1:14; see also Proverbs 1:7; Wisdom 12:11; Psalm 111:10). This attitude is not a frightened, servile submission to God, but rather a humble trust in his loving providence and protecting power. Read **Sirach 1:11-20** together as a group. What are the characteristics, blessings, and benefits of “the fear of the LORD”?

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Wisdom in Your Week

The invitation to fear the Lord reminds us of who should be at the center of our lives—and in control. In the coming week, ask yourself regularly, “Who is in the driver’s seat; who is on the throne?” If you can say God and God alone, that is the beginning of wisdom.

In addition to the Learning Wisdom and Living Wisdom sections included in each session in this journal, talk notes (Listening to Wisdom) are included to help you follow along with the video presentation. A Profiles in Wisdom feature in each session focuses on people from Church history who have exemplified wisdom in their own lives.

Lectio Divina

Four pages in each session are dedicated to the practice of *lectio divina*, which is a way of praying with the Bible. In *lectio divina*, a person chooses a short passage of Scripture and prays with it. The following steps of *lectio divina* are taken from *Praying Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*.¹

1. **Read** (*lectio*): Slowly read a Scripture passage several times, paying close attention to the words.
2. **Reflect** (*meditate, meditatio*): Meditate on the Scripture passage, thinking about specific words or ideas that stand out to you.
3. **Relate** (*pray, oratio*): Converse with God about the Scripture passage and its meaning for you.
4. **Rest** (*contemplate, contemplatio*): Sit quietly in God's presence, enjoying just being with him.

¹ Tim Gray, *Praying Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009), 36.

Wisdom from Father to Son

In ancient times, family authority and national leadership were passed on from father to son. This domestic dynamic was also the pattern for teaching wisdom (see Proverbs 1:8; Sirach 2:1). Much of our Old Testament wisdom literature was what a king would pass on to the heir of his throne. However, the use of masculine language should not lead us to believe that women were excluded from receiving or offering wisdom. Young people were taught to obey the instructions of their mothers (see Proverbs 6:20; Sirach 3:2) and to honor and respect the wisdom of both their parents (see Sirach 3:11, 7:27, 23:14). In fact, one of the most quoted sections of the Bible is the instruction given by the queen mother to her son, the king (see Proverbs 31). The wisdom of God is offered to anyone who will receive it, regardless of age or gender.



Listening to Wisdom

– Session One Talk Notes –

I. Introduction

- A. You and the world were created with wisdom (CCC 295); you need wisdom
- B. God's creatures are meant to share his being, wisdom, and goodness (CCC 295)
- C. Jesus is the Truth and the Wisdom (CCC 216)
- D. Wisdom pervades all things and helps us in all aspects of life (Wisdom 7:17-26)

II. Sources of Wisdom

- A. Wisdom defined
 - 1. The right application of knowledge, resulting in an integrated, fruitful, and holy life

2. The skill of living life from God's perspective
3. Prudence: synonym for wisdom (CCC 1806)

B. The foundation of wisdom

1. "The fear of the Lord" (Proverbs 9:10)
2. Humility
3. Jesus is Wisdom (Colossians 2:3; Mark 6:2; Revelation 5:12, 7:12)

C. Relationship between knowledge, wisdom, and understanding

1. Knowledge is "information gained through experience, reasoning, or acquaintance"

2. Wisdom is “the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting”
 - a. Knowledge can exist without wisdom, but not the other way around
 - b. A person can be knowledgeable without being wise
 - c. Knowledge is the ability to use a gun; wisdom is knowing when to use it
 3. When we walk in wisdom, understanding follows
- D. The value of wisdom (Proverbs 2:3-4, 8:10-11, 23:23)
- E. Worldly wisdom versus godly wisdom
- F. Wisdom books
1. Proverbs – Solomon: Wisdom gave order to chaos and gives order to our lives

2. Sirach (book of Ecclesiasticus) – ethical teachings from approximately 200–175 BC
3. Ecclesiastes – ascribed to Solomon: a search for happiness
4. Wisdom – Wisdom of Solomon: Wisdom is personified
5. Job – typically included in the wisdom literature
6. James – the New Testament proverbs

III. Conclusion

- A. Transform your mind (Romans 11:33–12:2)
- B. The qualities of wisdom (James 3:13-17)

Session Two



Wisdom in Decision-Making

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Introduction

Decisions. Decisions. Decisions. The average adult makes more than thirty thousand decisions a day. Many are made almost unconsciously, like our morning routine. Others are carefully deliberated, like a significant contract at work. And some are heart-wrenching, like an end-of-life decision for a loved one.

What are the principles that guide us in making those most important life decisions? In this session, we will explore the biblical principles for making decisions and how these spiritual guidelines can deepen our ongoing relationship of trust with the Lord and give us the courage to act.



Learning Wisdom

1. Read **Sirach 9:14-15** and **37:10-12**; **Proverbs 3:6** and **20:14-15**; and **Tobit 4:19**.

a. What principles of decision-making are discussed in these passages?

b. Which passage struck you most, and why?

2. Sacred Scripture and the Catholic Church identify seven gifts of the Holy Spirit given to us at baptism and strengthened at confirmation. Read **Isaiah 11** and **CCC 1831**. Reflect on these gifts in the light of godly decision-making. How would the cultivation of these gifts help you when you are facing difficult choices?

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3. Read **Proverbs 3:5-6, 21-26**. Undue anxiety often keeps us from making decisions. What wisdom do these Scripture passages offer us?

4. Having a well-formed conscience is indispensable in the Christian life. Review what the Church teaches about the conscience in **CCC 1776–1785**, and then use **CCC 1786–1789** to identify the factors necessary for making good judgments. What struck you most about these passages from the *Catechism*?



Living Wisdom

5. This week, apply some of the principles discussed in this session to a decision you need to make (it doesn't have to be a big one), and then answer the following questions.
- a. Which one of these principles is the most difficult for you to follow?

- b. What did you learn from using this process of decision-making? Be prepared to share your experience with your small group.



Lectio with Wisdom

Using the four-part model for *lectio divina* described on page 8, choose four days this week to meditate on the verses from Wisdom 9 provided on the following pages. Taken together, these verses are traditionally called the “Prayer of Solomon.” Record any insights or memorable meditations you have.

Day One
Wisdom 9:1-6

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Day Two

Wisdom 9:7-9

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Day Three
Wisdom 9:10-12

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Day Four
Wisdom 9:13-18

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Wisdom in the Word

Although the wisdom literature is a distinct genre in the Bible, it is present throughout salvation history. Chapter 10 in the book of Wisdom shows wisdom at work in the story of salvation from Adam to Moses and demonstrates how the wisdom of God was present, especially in the Exodus narrative (see Wisdom 11–12). Similarly, Sirach praised God's majesty and power as displayed in the works of creation (see Sirach 42:15–43:33) and sang a hymn to his ancestors. Beginning with Enoch, this wisdom song spans the biblical timeline up to Simon in the period of the Maccabees, highlighting the key prophets, priests, and kings of salvation history (see also Sirach 44–50). These verses provide valuable insights and details.



Profiles in Wisdom

Ten Tips on Decision-Making from St. Ignatius of Loyola

We all need to see concrete examples of wise living. St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the fiery founder of the Jesuits, is a perfect guide for making smart decisions. His rich advice on decision-making, found in his *Spiritual Exercises*, is too vast to include here, but the following ten tips from this prayerful saint can help us.

1. The first principle of good decision-making is to ensure you are choosing between two goods: *Should I get married or become a priest or religious?* The question, *Should I cheat on my taxes?*, would be the wrong question.
2. Pray for the grace that your chief desire will be to love and serve God faithfully. Any individual choice must be seen through that relational paradigm and should set you on the course that helps you best serve God.
3. Be alert. There will always be struggle and internal conflict. Sometimes this will reach the level of spiritual warfare. Our false human ego, habitual sin, fears, and outside spiritual influences are often at play in making important decisions.

4. Set your choices before your mind clearly.
5. Pray for the grace to be objective about the choices in front of you. Do not come to the Lord with your mind already made up looking for him to confirm your choice.
6. Identify the “pros” and “cons” of each path. Looking ahead to the end of your life, which choice would serve the Lord best?
7. Seek the wise counsel of a mature Christian, spiritual director, or trusted mentor.
8. Having done all this, make an objectively reasoned judgment and ask the Lord to give you a confirmation. A sense of peace, joy, and “rightness” after making the decision should be present. If you still feel doubt, anxiety, or heaviness of heart, this may indicate that the choice was not a wise one and that you need to review the steps above with the help of a trusted friend or mentor.
9. If your decision is confirmed by a sense of peace, take a concrete “next action” toward that end and watch for further direction from the Lord.
10. Finally, don’t forget that although there may be difficulties ahead, God desires your happiness and fulfillment.



Listening to Wisdom

– Session Two Talk Notes –

I. Introduction

- A. Do you live by godly principles or personal preferences? (Psalm 37:4; CCC 1768; Wisdom 7:27)
- B. The place of decision
 - 1. In the heart: in a covenant relationship with God (CCC 1768)
 - 2. In the Holy Spirit (John 16:13)
 - 3. In Scripture and Tradition (Psalm 119:105)
- C. Decisions are an act of the will

II. Practical Steps in Decision-Making

- A. Ask for help (James 1:5)

- B. Gather the important data
 - 1. Search for everything you can find (knowledge) on the topic (Proverbs 13:16)

 - 2. Study of God's Word, prayer, and counsel

- C. Talk to knowledgeable people (Proverbs 24:6, 11:14, 18:1)

- D. Consider the cost
 - 1. Ask yourself, "What will this decision cost me?"

2. Think about your time, money, resources, and gifts (Proverbs 19:12)

E. How is it going to affect your vocation?

F. How does your experience play into this decision?
(Proverbs 26:11)

G. Consider your family background

H. Consider your reputation and witness
(Proverbs 22:1, 25:26)

I. Don't wait for perfection (Ecclesiastes 11:4)

- J. Act on your decision (Matthew 7:24-27)

III. Conscience

- A. Everyone has an obligation to form his or her conscience (CCC 1798)
- B. A well-formed conscience is formed by God's Word, principles not preferences

IV. Conclusion

- A. All of life is a decision-making process
- B. God will give you peace in making decisions (Philippians 4:7)