

Last week we talked about one of your greatest strengths – your power to choose. Things just don't happen without a choice. Not choosing is a choice! Staying neutral is a choice! This week, we'll investigate how to get your choice back. How can you reclaim your power to choose?

Think about this statement: "Life is 10% of what happens to you and 90% of how you respond to what happens."

Question 1: Do you think that statement is true? Why?

Let's look at what the Bible says about our power to choose. God wants us to make the right decision every time. It's the verses we looked at last week.

Deuteronomy 30:15-19 NIV

15 See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. 16 For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

17 But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, 18 I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.

How do we make right choices? Everyone has life and death choices to make. Everyone can either choose prosperity or destruction. What is the key to making the right choice? In verse 16, God said he commanded us to love the Lord, walk in his ways, and keep his commands. THEN and only then will we increase and live the good life.

Question 2: Have you ever tried to possess the good life (life, prosperity, etc.) without following God?

Do you remember as a kid your parents telling you not to play with fire? Why? It could burn, destroy and potentially kill. I remember setting a Kleenex on fire from the stove when I was about 5. I panicked and threw it into the trash can – BIG MISTAKE. I went and sat down in the living room and watched the Dukes of Hazard like nothing had happened – all while the kitchen was on fire! Maybe my parents wouldn't notice. Maybe it would go out on its own. Boy, was I in trouble!

That's like our life sometimes. We know the consequences are evident, but we try and ignore them. Others see their destruction surrounding us and may even try and warn us. Eventually, we cannot avoid the consequences of choosing wrongly. Sometimes we break God's commands and wonder why our life is falling apart. We blame God for our problems when He gave us a clear warning of the consequences of our sinful actions.

Let's look once again at the diagram of choice.

THE DOT OF CHOICE

Every choice is a “dot”. We can either choose to go toward life by making God-honoring choices or toward death by choosing anti-Godly things. Make a line from the dot on the bottom to the dot toward “Life”. Think about the blessings that surround choosing life. Now make a line from the dot on the bottom to the dot next to “Death”. Think about the destruction that comes from choosing death. Which do you want?

LIFE

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DEATH

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Let’s look at some more scripture concerning the heart.

Proverbs 4:23 NIV

23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

How do you guard your heart? By reading the word and obeying the commands of the Lord.

Matthew 12:34 NIV

34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

It is a reality check that what comes out of your mouth is only a result of the condition of your heart. If you have negative talk, then negativity resides in your heart. If it is gossip, then gossip lies deep in your heart. Your words depict the condition of your heart

Proverbs 23:7 NKJV

7 For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

You cannot be two-faced and get away with it for long – if at all! You may be saying one thing to someone, but inside your heart is filled with something else. The real you resides inside your soul man. Are you putting up a façade? Look inside your heart – who is the real you? Are you happy with that person? Does your heart reflect the nature of Christ?

So, how do we purify our hearts? How do we change and start choosing life? I think it begins with reprogramming the heart and mind.

A computer is programmed to perform a certain way. Someone spent many long hours setting commands so the computer would give the desired end result. But computers also have to be reprogrammed and updated. My computer is automatically set to download and install recommended updates from the creators of the software I use. This is a good thing, because there are hackers and viruses that want to destroy work all the programmers have done. To protect my computer and continue to use it to meet the demands of my life, I choose to allow software and anti-virus updates. My computer is scanned daily for threats to its overall health. Deep scans are performed to find hidden dangers.

To ensure health of your spiritual life, you also must undergo “deep scanning”. The Holy Spirit must be able to search your heart and convict and correct wrong programming and motives. You must daily allow the Designer and Master Programmer tweak your heart and mind.

POINT #1

“Identify where your **PROGRAMMING** came from.”

You must recognize that you were formed in God’s image.

Genesis 3:9-11 NIV

9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

When Adam and Eve sinned they tried to hide it from God. Actually, THEY tried to hide from God. Impossible! While God knew where they were – hiding behind a bush that he created and placed (God knew all good hiding spots), He still called out to them and asked them where they were? Did He know – of course! But here was another chance for choosing right or wrong for Adam and Eve. They replied that they hid because they were naked. What! Naked – it was like saying “we are blah blah blah.” They had not know what nakedness was before this point. In fact, lets look at another scripture to back this up.

Genesis 2:25 NIV

25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

They were naked before, but didn’t know it. Because of their sin – wrong choices – their innocence was lost. Shame now was upon mankind. Their nakedness had to be covered, so they hid. God killed the first animal (Genesis 3:21) and covered their nakedness. (Shopping would now abound on the earth).

The main point here is what God asked them: “Who told you that you were naked?” Their innocence was lost because their minds had been reprogrammed. Thoughts entered their minds and hearts that never would have been there if they had not entertained and chosen evil.

In Psalm 139 we find out that God formed us. Verses 23-24 say: **“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”** This is reprogramming of the heart. God needs to scan your heart and test our thought patterns. If offensive ways are found, we need to be reprogrammed to produce life-giving fruit.

QUESTION 1: Where does your programming come from? What or who is influencing the outcome and decisions of your life?

The Bible says that we are what our heart thinks. The real “us” is found in the programming of our hearts. Where do we get our thoughts from? Are you programmed for insecurity? What about fear? Let’s look at where we get our thought patterns that determine our choices.

4 PLACES YOU GET THOUGHTS

1. GENETICS

It is true that we think certain ways because of just being born. Romans 5:12-21 says we are all sinners because of Adam’s sin. But verse 21 says that grace should reign. We do not have to accept and conform to this way of living. Jesus has overcome sin and death.

Romans 5:18-19 NLT

Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. 19 Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

2. LIFE EXPERIENCES

We form thought patterns by past life experiences. Maybe you have had a lot of trauma in your life. As a result, your outlook on life could be that bad things just happen to you. You begin to accept this way of thinking and living. In fact, all your choices revolve around your traumatic experiences. Those experiences determine how you react and respond to all other situations in life.

Paul said this Philippians 4:10-13

10I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

3. PEOPLE YOU HAVE BEEN AROUND

Did you know that you develop thought patterns because of the people you spend time with? In 1 Corinthians 15:33, the apostle Paul writes “bad company corrupts good morals. This is not a new concept developed by Paul. In fact, we see the same caution being offered over 1,400 years earlier by Joshua. In Joshua 23:1-16, this aging, courageous leader challenges the Israelites to faithfully complete the task at hand of removing the nations from their land, the good land the Lord had given them. In the meantime, they are to be careful not to align with these unbelieving nations, intermarry with them, or worship their false gods. The same word of caution is advisable today. Believers must remain faithful to the Lord and fully committed to His Word. We must be careful to obey Him with all our hearts, and guard against the enticement of today’s “false gods.”

4. THINGS YOU TELL YOURSELF

You can convince yourself of anything. Now, that doesn't mean it is true. The more you listen to lies and deception, the more you start to believe them. You have to put truth into your situation by believing the Word of God.

If you are telling yourself that you'll always be a drunk because of ..., then you are setting yourself up for failure. Sometimes, people tell themselves that they act a certain way because, after all, that is how their _____ was.

2 Thessalonians 2:12 says, "...who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness". You can begin believing lies and taking pleasure in unrighteousness thoughts and actions. We must put into practice these verses:

"Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25).

"Buy the truth and do not sell it; also wisdom, and instruction and understanding" (Prov. 23:23)

What change do you want? Do you want to be reprogrammed? Do you like the outcome of your past decisions?

POINT #2

"Identify what CHANGE you really want."

The Bible teaches that the believer has three main spiritual responsibilities in the sanctification process. God, the Holy Spirit, is the primary initiator in all of these activities, and a believer must cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is doing in his life. The apostles Paul and James give these three responsibilities to us. Paul's instruction is given to us in **Eph 4:22-24**:

" that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

James's instruction is in **James 1:21-22**:

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

POINT #3

“Re-choose your **EXTERIOR** dialogue.”

POINT #4

“Re-choose your **INTERIOR** dialogue.”

I think Point #3 and #4 can be made and corrected by a three step pattern.

1.) put off the old; 2.) renew our mind; 3.) put on the new. When the Holy Spirit enables a believer in these activities, then He, the Holy Spirit, will produce a certain kind of fruit in our lives. Our flesh will be restrained, our mind will be renewed, and Christ will be revealed through our example and ministry to others.

Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "mortifying" or "putting to death" the "deeds of the body." This means we are to kill their action by dealing with the indwelling sin that motivates them. When we do this, we have mortified the "flesh" or killed its influence on us at that moment. In order to do this we must **know** some facts about our identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. We have been crucified with Christ and are dead to sin. We must **consider** these facts to be true for us in our own life, whether our feelings at any given moment agree or not. Then, as a result of what we know and consider, we must **present** our whole selves, mind and body, to Christ, to be used for His glory. These three instructions need to be heeded each day that we live.

Now the reason why it is so hard to kill the actions of our indwelling sin is that we are creatures of habit.

The three most fundamental problems with a habit are,

1. We have become comfortable with the habit
2. We automatically respond to certain given situations or stimuli in a habitual way
3. We engage in the practice, or at least begin to do so, without conscious thought or decision

Breaking habits require regular, structured, endurance in putting off and putting on. The elements involved in this process are:

1. Becoming aware of the practice (pattern) that must be put off
2. Discovering the biblical alternative
3. Structuring the situation for change
4. Breaking links in the chain of sin
5. Getting help from others
6. Learning to see how particular sin habits affect our entire relationship to Christ
7. Practicing the new pattern

Once we've identified habits that we need to stop, we need to learn what the biblical alternatives are and then structure our situations to make positive changes. In addition, we need to learn how to break

links in the chain of sin. There are at least two points at which we can stop a sinful action - at the point of resistance and at the point of restraint. In other words, we are to learn to prevent the sinful behavior from ever happening in the first place, or, once the sinful behavior has begun, we are to learn to curtail it. We can go a long ways to preventing the sinful behavior from ever happening in the first place if we moment by moment learn to look beyond our own behavior and emotions and ask ourselves, "What is the ruling lust in my heart right now that is driving this behavior or emotion? Am I going to please God or please myself in this or that thing before me?"

The goal is biblical action, not sinful reaction; control by the Scriptures, not by the situation . While resistance is the desirable response, since that alone will keep us from sinning, we nevertheless have to learn what to do whenever we fail to resist temptation. We need to learn self-control . Restraint means to recognize our sin as it happens, seek forgiveness for it, and obtain help to discontinue it. The more frequently we prevent sin, the less frequently we will need to curtail it, and the more frequently we curtail it, the sooner we will be able to prevent it altogether .

Our desire for God is then, first, an assurance that we are His children, and second, the sign that He is at work in our lives. If we have a desire for God, then we will also seek Him. Deuteronomy 4:9 says that we must seek God with all our heart. Jesus said no man can serve two masters (Matt 6:24). If we consider God and His interests a small thing, it is because we must be passionate about something else. **Apathy toward God is the result of being passionate toward something or someone else .** We can only have a dependent, personal relationship with God if we are willing to seek Him and forsake all other loves. God does not reveal Himself to the casual observer, but only to the wholehearted and single-minded. Notice the whole-hearted search for wisdom in Proverbs 2:1-5

Proverbs 2:1-5

2:1 My son, if you will receive my sayings, And treasure my commandments within you,

2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;

3 For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding;

4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures;

5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, And discover the knowledge of God.

God deserves first place in our lives, and demands it, if we are to know Him in any kind of personal, intimate way. Seeking God is not just an exercise in exploring Bible content. The Bible is first and foremost a revelation from God about His Son. There is a Person at the center of everything we read in the Bible. If we merely look for principles and encouraging passages, we will find what we are looking for, but we may miss God in the process. We have to stop and ask our self, "What does this passage reveal to me about Jesus Christ?" **If we don't see the Person behind the principles, we will have missed God's intention for His revelation.**

You may be asking right now, "How does a search for God and a study of His attributes, change me and make me more like Christ? What does this have to do with renewing my mind?" The answer is that exposure to God will bring about profound change in us - the kind of change to Christlikeness that we need. Being Christlike means acquiring His communicable attributes - those generally known as the "fruit of the Spirit." Galations 5:22-23 lists several facets of the Spirit's fruit. This list is representative, not exhaustive. It lists love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These are qualities that God possesses and that any believer can "get" if he is controlled by the Holy Spirit. When Christ walked on this earth, these were characteristics of His life. Only when we manifest these characteristics, can we say that we have a Christian, or Christlike, character.

2 Corinthians 3:18 is a key verse in understanding biblical change:

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.