

We've been looking at the way our ability to choose can either bring you blessing or cursing. According to the main scripture of this message series on choice, Deuteronomy 30:11-20 NIV, God desires for you to make the right choices that bring life. He is pulling for you to make life-giving decisions. The Lord longs to bless you for choosing His ways!

This week, let's look at how our life experiences can affect the way we make choices.

Let me set up the environment or life experience of the Israelites in Deuteronomy 30.

- 1) For forty years the Israelites have been wandering in the wilderness.
- 2) For their disobedience, God decreed that every one above the age of twenty with the exception of Joshua and Caleb would die in the wilderness (Numbers 14:29-38).
- 3) Now, that generation had passed away. There was a new generation standing before Moses.
- 4) And his last act as their spiritual leader was to rehearse to them all the things of the law.
- 5) The book of Deuteronomy is the book in which Moses does this (Deuteronomy 5:1).
- 6) In chapter 30, Moses exhorts the Israelites to obey Jehovah.
- 7) He tells them that God's commands are not hard to keep (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).
- 8) He then lays before them the decision (read Deuteronomy 30:15-20.)

The life experience of the Israelites was very much a factor in their decision making process. After all, this new generation had only known wandering in the desert. I'm sure they were tired of "walking in circles". Some of them sure wanted change (the Promised Land). Still others were probably in neutral concerning following the Lord. I mean, Desert Life is all they had known all their life and for some it was comfortable.

Since Moses isn't entering the Promised Land with them, he is setting them up (hopefully and prayerfully) for success as they inherit the Promised Land. Now, that just doesn't happen. They have to decide to take it many times in many battles. There were great obstacles in their way, but one thing was certain – God had said it was theirs for the possessing. The Good Life was available to them **IF** they would listen to Moses' instructions, follow the Lord and their new leader Joshua and took the necessary steps to obtain the Promised Land.

For the Israelites, there were decisions to be made that day as Moses spoke. "Do we like our current circumstances? Do we want another 40 years of wandering? Do we trust the Lord's promise of the good life? Do we even care?"

Action is required for change.

To make any decision that is God-honoring, there are certain steps one must follow. Now, we've all made decisions we later have come to regret. Most of the time it is because we didn't process our decision before we made it. Either we reacted out of impulse or emotion or just didn't give it enough to hear from the Lord about our decision.

Granted, some decisions are “common sense”. If you are still struggling with decisions like whether or not to read your bible or go to church – COME ON!!! Although there are some big decisions in life to make – who to marry, where to work, how many kids, chicken or beef (well maybe not the last one), your life is really shaped by the everyday small decisions. Most people are going to pray about and deeply consider the big decisions before leaping into them – or at least they should and maybe regret not doing that now. But, it’s the smaller decisions we make every day that we leave God out of. I’m not talking about where to eat (unless it involves a bar and someone other than your spouse, but that’s another sermon).

Let me give you four steps to consider when making a decision:

FOUR ACTION STEPS

1. Ask yourself: “Is this a **CHOICE**.”

You have to consider if you have to make a decision – something that requires thought and prayer. If it is a choice with consequences that will allow or disallow you the experience of the Good Life, then you need to stop and realize you have a choice upon you. That may seem silly, but most people blindly choose things every day that get them in trouble later down the road.

Not choosing to eat healthy can have huge consequences later down the road. Not choosing to be at work on time can get you fired. Not choosing to wake up a little earlier and spend more time with the Lord can affect you greatly. **YOU HAVE A CHOICE!**

2. If the answer is “yes”, say: “This choice is **MINE**.”

You may be thinking, “Of course it is my choice. That seems so trivial.” But you must realize that it is YOUR choice. The responsibility of choice is denied by so many people when bad consequences happen. It seems it is always someone else’s fault. If you find yourself always blaming someone else for junk that happens in your life, stop and see if your bad choices got you there.

3. Say: “My **CHOICE** is ...”

In order for you to determine your choice, you must weigh out all the pros and cons of your decision. Ask yourself things like: Will this honor the Lord? Is there anything in the Bible against what I’m about to do? (this means you have to look up scripture or get counsel on your situation). What will the outcome be from my decision?

4. Always be aware why you **MADE THE CHOICE YOU MADE**. Say to yourself: “I made this choice because...”

There should be evidence as to why you made a particular choice. John wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). We should love to make choices that keep God’s commandments.

Some people don’t like process. Why? It requires more from them. Sometimes they are lazy or apathetic. To process anything takes time, effort and resources. Process means you weigh something out. Let me ask you a question: Would you process the decision of what school to send you kids to? Would you process the decision of what meat to buy in the grocery store? Would you process the decision of whether or not to turn left or right at the stop sign? The answers are YES, YES, and YES! Every decision requires process. Process gives your kids a good education. Process keeps you from eating spoiled meat. Process keeps you from turning right onto a one way street!

Don't fear process. Some things take more time than others to decide. You still should go through the process EVERYTIME, regardless of what process takes from you. Think about what consequence will take from you if you don't process? PROCESS THAT!

Your choices affect your life experience. Let me give you four evidences of this:

CHOICES AFFECT YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE

1. Your different choices affect your **DESTINY**.

QUESTION: What outcome do you want from life? What do you want for your children?

Moses told the Israelites that choosing life would affect their kids and the generations that follow them. **YOUR DECISIONS DO NOT JUST AFFECT YOU.**

QUESTION: What kind of legacy do you want to leave? 2 Timothy 4:7 says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith".

Do you ever wonder what kind of legacy you'll leave behind?

I the story of an older gentleman who was the epitome of grace toward others; and he was deeply loved by his wife, his daughters, and his sons-in-law. In fact, his sons-in-law knelt by his bed as he died. Afterward, one of his daughters wrote a letter and at the end of the note, she concluded with these powerful words: "Our world has lost a righteous man, and in this world, that's no small thing."

I love the legacy expressed in those simple words from the pen of an admiring daughter. It reminds me of the heart of Paul as he wrote to his friend Timothy. Paul had expended himself in the service of Christ and had a keen sense that he was nearing the end of his life. We know from his writings to other churches that he was not afraid of death. In fact, he clearly stated that if he were absent from the body, he would be present with the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:3). The resurrection had defeated the sting of death (15:55), and Paul couldn't wait to meet his Savior.

As Paul pondered the end of his life, he made three very simple statements about his legacy. He had "fought the good fight"—standing firm as a spiritual warrior, clothed in the armor of God, faithfully defending the truth of the gospel. He had "finished the race"—ensuring in the process that he was neither disqualified nor disheartened in the marathon of life and ministry. Most importantly, he had "kept the faith"—remaining true, committed, and loyal to the one whom rescued him from sin and darkness.

Notice that Paul's brief statements here say nothing about the education he had received, the places he had traveled, the letters he had written, the people he had preached to, or the churches he had planted. He flat out wanted his legacy to be labeled as "faithful." I love that! It's what I want to aspire to as a follower of Jesus.

So, I have to ask myself, "If that's the kind of legacy I want to leave, how would I pursue it today?" Well, it means that my choices need to be more about "fighting the good fight." I need to put on the spiritual armor each morning, as Paul told the Ephesians to do, and live to be victorious in all that

comes my way. I need to be running the race to win, putting off all that hinders and the sins that entangle (Hebrews 12:1). And, it means that in every situation I want my attitudes, my words, and my actions to be loyal and true to Jesus.

As Paul told the Philippians, “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (3:13-14). There’s no better time than the start of this New Year to set our sights on new goals that will, over time, develop a legacy worth leaving.

Building a legacy worth leaving behind begins today and is made one decision at a time. Live this year to hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In my book, that’s a legacy worth living for!

PRACTICE THIS...

- Spend a few minutes thinking about the legacy you would like to leave. How does that compare to Paul’s desired legacy expressed in 2 Timothy 4?
- What type of legacy will the current choices and priorities of your life lead to? Are there some changes that need to take place today to move you back toward a legacy of faithful service to Christ?
- The good news for each of us is that God’s grace is available to forgive, cleanse, and refocus us today! He can use whatever time you have left to bring glory and honor to Him.

Jonah 1:3 tells how the decision of Jonah affected his life experience. He lived in whale for three days! Judges 16 tells of how Samson’s decisions affected his life experience. It eventually left him blind, powerless and dead (although God granted him strength one last time). Nehemiah 2 tells of the trouble Nehemiah faced: the city was in ruins! But, his decision was to overcome this and rebuild the wall and experience a better life.

2. Different choices affect our **STATE OF MIND**.

QUESTION: What kind of “state of mind” do you want? Do you want one of gloom and despair or one of peace and joy?

Philippians 2:5 says, “Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus.”

QUESTION: What affects your state of mind? Music? TV? Relationships? Reading material?

Here is what Philippians 4:8-9 says we should meditate on:

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. **9** The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

3. **WANTING** something and **CHOOSING** something are two different things.

In 1 Samuel 17 (NIV), David chose to defeat Goliath. Many people were standing around wanting Goliath to be defeated, but only David made the decision to defeat him. Read these scriptures:

24 When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear.

25 Now the Israelites had been saying, "Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father's family from taxes in Israel."

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, **35** I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. **36** Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. **37** The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you."

45 David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. **46** This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.

David's decision was great. His actions proved out his decision. Other people wanted Goliath defeated, but only David's actions proved it.

QUESTION: What "Goliath" is in your way? Do you want it defeated? Do you choose to defeat it? What action steps will you take to defeat it?

QUESTION: What are the things you really want? How do you get them?

4. You have to **CHOOSE** to come out of your **HOLDING PATTERNS**.

What is a holding pattern? It is a maneuver designed to delay an aircraft already in flight while keeping it within a specified airspace. Have you ever circled the airport waiting to land? You've been in a holding pattern. You didn't do what the flight was intended to do – land. You can't stay in a holding pattern forever or you will run out of gas or perhaps crash and die.

The same is true about staying neutral in your decision making process. You may be saying you don't have a problem making decisions. Let me give you some "warning signs" of a habitual holding pattern lifestyle. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Can I decide what movie to see in a reasonable amount of time?
2. Can I decide where to eat or make a choice from a menu without waiting till the last minute?

3. Can I decide what to wear each day? A better question for most is “can I decide what NOT to wear” because of all the clothing we own.

Those are simple issues, well, for most of us anyway. Let me give you some more questions that, while are necessary for processing decisions, place people in a holding pattern.

- What is the “best case” desired outcome? Will your decision move you toward that outcome?
- What is an “acceptable” outcome?
- What is the worst thing that could possible happen if you make the “wrong” decision? Can you accept this?
- Is your decision reversible?
- Will a wrong decision destroy value, confidence or trust of anyone involved?
- Do you have enough information to make the decision?
- Do you have too much information?
- Who knows more about this subject than you....what are their recommendations?
- Are you the right person to be making this decision?
- Will avoiding making a decision now make the situation better, worse or have no effect?
- Does the decision provide a short term fix or will it solve the problem permanently (long term)?

For some people, when they start to process their decision they either panic (fear) or go into neutral (insecurity). If these kinds of questions stop your decision making, you must deal with it. You have to stop living in fear. You have to become more secure in who you are in Christ. Stop panicking and start deciding.

Sometimes people draw a line in the sand and won't cross it because of fear, insecurity, uncertainty, or past hurt.

QUESTION: What keeps you in a holding pattern?

QUESTION: What keeps you from stepping over the line?

Have you ever seen someone who acts spiritual but when it comes down to it, can't make decisions that will lead to spiritual growth? To move forward in your walk with the Lord, you must make decisions. You have to stop with the excuses. Here are some excuses for lack of spiritual growth I've heard before:

- I'm waiting on God to show me
- I've been offended at another believer
- My past circumstances...
- My mom/dad/family...
- If you knew what I was going through...

Some of these excuses sound spiritual but are really just a mask to remain neutral.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 explains that if you wait too long to decide you'll never decide.

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”

Colossians 3:23 says this as well.

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”

You have to choose what you are going to do in life.

Below are some examples of choices. After those are blanks I want you to write down what you choose. Try not to write down the examples unless they absolutely apply to you. Search your heart and ways and find out what choices you need to make today.

1. I choose not to complain
2. I choose to compliment
3. I choose to be a leader
4. I choose to lose some weight
5. I choose to be friendly
6. I choose to be generous
7. I choose not to worry
8. I choose to tithe
9. I choose to radically commit myself to Jesus and His church
10. I choose to fight the good fight of faith
11. I choose faith over fear
12. I choose to pray over my children
13. I choose to be in a Life Group

Now, write down your choices in the blanks below:
