

## Making Good Choices

Air Dates: January 9-13, 2023

### Day One

How many choices do you think you make in a normal day? You probably would never guess 35,000 choices a day, but various sources estimate that an adult makes 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day. This sounds a bit absurd to me and I'm guessing it does to you as well, but when you think about all the choices you consciously and subconsciously make, you realize it's a lot more than you might guess.

You have been given a free-will to make a multitude of choices in life about:

- what to eat
- what to wear
- what to purchase
- what you believe
- what jobs and career choices you will pursue
- who to spend your time with
- who you will date and marry
- what you say and how you say it

Not to mention all the choices you make for others—as a parent or a manager or a spouse! The list could go on and on, and each choice carries its own consequences—some good, some bad, some neutral. This ability to choose is an incredible power that we have each been given by God and our challenge as Christ-followers is to be sure we are choosing according to biblical principles.

Our choices pile up on each other over our lifetime, and if you get into the habit of making poor choices, that can take you to outcomes you really don't want. But the good news is, you can establish good habits of making good choices and that means your life can go in a much better direction.

Some things to consider about your approach to making choices:

- Watch out for impulsive choices. They are often based on emotions or lack of adequate information and end up not so good.
- Watch out for procrastination—putting off choices that need to be made now. Procrastination is a deadly bad habit that needs to be purged and forsaken.
- Watch out for making choices to please other people, or choices just because they are popular. Those choices are often not in agreement with biblical principles.

Your approach to how you make choices—big and small—is the first important thing to consider because a good approach will lead to good outcomes.

I want to point out what the Bible teaches us about making choices, and we'll look at some people in the Bible who make really good choices and others who didn't. It seems like a good thing to consider as we begin this New Year.

## Day Two

Can you think of some choices you've made—maybe even recently—that you would like to do-over? Choices have consequences, that's for sure, so I want to remind you of some biblical principles about choices.

This one from Joshua is no doubt the most important choice we make:

*"But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord"* (Joshua 24:15).

Joshua puts it to the people of Israel that they have a choice as to who they will serve, the Lord God or some false pagan god. That was a default choice. If they don't choose to serve the Lord God, they will by default serve a false god. One or the other.

We have default choices, too. Failing to make one choice means you are choosing another choice by default. If you have made a choice to be a Christ-follower, to serve the Lord, then that means you are choosing not to serve other gods, gods of your own making, gods of our culture. Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve God and money—or other things that can crawl up on the throne of our heart.

Joshua began by saying *"if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you"* because sometimes it may seem "undesirable"—not easy. For example, serving the Lord on your job could require taking a stand that isn't politically correct, which could have unpleasant consequences for you and your career. So, you have to decide in advance that serving the Lord *is* desirable—is your choice. Joshua took that stand—"we will serve the Lord," he said.

In our culture today, I believe we as Christ-followers will need to decide in advance—make a determination and commitment in our minds and hearts—that we choose to serve the Lord. We choose to stand true to God's Word. That is the most important choice you and I will ever make. Like Joshua, we should make that a firm decision in our minds, and a choice we reinforce and re-commit regularly. Can you say, "I choose to serve the Lord—no matter what"?

## Day Three

This passage from Proverbs 8 gives some good advice about making choices:

Proverbs 8:10 - 11

*Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.*

Choosing the instruction of wisdom over riches is both biblical and smart. According to this proverb, nothing you desire can compare with acquiring wisdom. Are you focused and intentional about learning to be wise? And how do you choose the instruction of wisdom?

Well, another proverb says, *"Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm"* (Proverbs 13:20). So, you choose to closely associate with wise people; you are careful who you allow to influence you, who you listen to. As Christ-followers, we don't isolate ourselves from the world, but it is extremely important who we "walk with," making sure our instructors are biblically wise.

Another proverb says, *"For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding"* (Proverbs 2:6). And, of course, God's wisdom—the words from his mouth—are given to us in the Scriptures and through prayer. In fact, James writes: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you"* (James 1:5).

Have you ever taken that promise seriously? I remember some years ago when I had to make a rather quick decision about an important matter, and afterwards I remember thinking, *Wow, can't believe I made such a good decision*. Then the Holy Spirit quietly reminded me that I had been consistently praying for wisdom and God answered my prayers. The Lord gave me wisdom—and continues to when I intentionally look for wisdom in his word and pray for wisdom.

Becoming wise is a choice you make. It takes some discipline and effort, but it is one of the smartest disciplines you will ever incorporate into your life. Choosing wisdom keeps you from much regret and heartache.

## Day Four

Have you noticed that the Bible doesn't spare telling us the whole story? We can learn from some of the people in the Bible who made some dreadful choices.

David comes to mind, this man after God's own heart. But his choice to call for Bathsheba, commit adultery, have her husband killed—all of those sordid details are in the Bible. I wonder how often David thought about the consequences of that terribly bad choice he made. He paid a very heavy price personally for that choice, and yet God still loved him and used him.

On the other hand, think of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—those three young Jewish men taken captive to Babylon. They were commanded to worship the pagan statue that King Nebuchadnezzar made or be thrown in the fiery furnace. They had a choice to make. I love how they responded to the King:

*"King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:16b-18).*

Just as these men chose to take that strong stand for their God, it's possible that you will have to face some similar choices. You may be facing some fiery furnaces even now: instructions from your company that are not compatible with your faith; disrespect from family members or friends who condemn you for not going along with the culture; rejection from people who think you are weird because you stand strong for your biblical convictions. Will you choose, as these three men did, that you will not serve other gods? You will not give in to the pressure to abandon your beliefs, knowing as they did that you may indeed have to live with the consequences of your choice? Are you determined by God's grace to take the "even if he does not" stand for Jesus?

## Day Five

I've been focusing on the importance of the choices we make—our every day choices about small things and the larger ones that make a difference in the direction of our lives. This passage from Jeremiah gives some good advice about making choices:

This is what the Lord says: *"Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it'" (Jeremiah 6:16).*

Jeremiah is warning us against making decisions too quickly and making them without seeking God's guidance. He says stand and look; think of what this decision will look like down the road. Don't be deceived by the momentary glamor or attractiveness of this choice; what is it going to look like in a week, a month, a year—eternity? Then he advises us to look for the good way, the ancient path. That

means take time to pray about it, seek godly advice if needed, ask God where the good way is. Often it's not the way you may be intending to go.

Interesting that in that day the people refused to choose the good way. They just said, "Nope, not going to go that way. I'm going my own way." I can think of choices I've made where, in a real sense, I said the same thing—going to do it my way. And without exception, those choices were harmful; I didn't find rest for my soul

Could that be where you are at this point in your life? You're facing a decision—a choice—and you just want what you want and you want it now, so you're not asking for the good way, the ancient path that will lead you to soul rest. If so, I strongly urge you to stand at this crossroad in your life—this decision you are facing—and seek God's way and then walk in it. You'll never regret that choice.

Or maybe you're living with the consequences of choosing your way instead of God's way. Let me encourage you to know that God hasn't given up on you. He always has a plan to prosper you and help you, taking you where you are, even as you are living with those consequences, and making a way for you that leads to soul rest, to a renewed relationship with God through Jesus. It's never too late to stand at the crossroads and choose the good way, the ancient path.