

Wise Choices

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone, and welcome. They told me not to go too long, so I will break at noon.

! Those of you that want to stay later, you can hear the second half. Let's bow our heads for a word of prayer.

Father, we invite you in this morning, and we'd ask, Lord, that you would speak to hearts over the things that are shared today.

Father, you said your word would not return unto you void, so we trust that it will accomplish everything according to your good pleasure. And I thank you for the opportunity to share with your people.

And Father, we commit this time to your loving hands. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Every day, every day of our lives, we literally make thousands of choices.

[1 : 19] And oftentimes, we might not think of those, but some years back, we had a gentleman in the church that was trying to quit smoking, and he wasn't having any luck with it.

He prayed, and he tried, and he did the, I don't know if they did the patches back then or what, but he was always struggling with it. And one day when we were talking, he was telling me about his struggles.

And I told him, I said, every time, have you ever woke up in the middle of the night and you wanted a cigarette and you found that you didn't have any left in your pack?

And he said, oh yeah, that's happened a few. I said, what did you do? He said, some nights I tried to go back to sleep, but it was hard. Other nights I'd get up, get in the car, and drive to one of the stores that were open, and I'd get some.

I said, do you realize that God gave you a chance? He was answering your prayer every step of the way. You made a choice to get up.

[2 : 31] You made a choice to get dressed. You made a choice to go out. You made a choice to get in your car. You made a choice to turn up this street and then turn that street and then turn this street.

And eventually you got to the open store and you made a choice to go inside and buy a pack. And then you made a choice to open it up, take one out, and you made a choice to light it.

So God was answering your prayers in each one of those steps, giving you an opportunity to turn away from that which you were struggling with. He said, I never thought about that.

Well, within about a month or so after that, with his struggling and his thinking about all the steps, he said he'd drive a little ways and struggle because he knew he wanted one and he knew God was giving him an opportunity to turn back and go home.

And that might be a little bit of a weird illustration for some of you, but it's a very real situation that we face. Every time, if not most times, if not every time, we have an opportunity to turn away.

[4 : 02] And so I'd like for us to look at how the Old Testament provides valuable lessons for us as Christians. In 1 Corinthians 10-11, it says, Now these things happened to them as an example and were written for our instructions upon whom the end of the ages have come.

One such lesson is the importance of making wise choices. Some years ago, I taught at a youth camp and I was sharing with them about you win or lose by how you choose.

And of course, that message was somewhat similar to this except it dealt with all team issues.

Promiscuity, rebellion to your parents, etc., etc.

But today, I want us to look at making wise choices in our life. Consider Lot. Lot made a choice as to where to live and as a result of that, he experienced war.

He experienced kidnapping in Genesis 14. Oppression and torment by the ungodly citizens of Sodom.

[5 : 35] In 2 Peter 2, verses 7 and 8, it says, If he rescued the righteous lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men, for by whom what he saw and heard, that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with the lawless deeds of the citizens in that town.

And we know that God ultimately destroyed the town. But in that, as a result of his decision, he lost all of his possessions.

He lost his wife. His wife was turned into a pillar of salt and incest with his daughters in Genesis 19. So as a result of that one decision to move down into Sodom, because it looked better, sometimes things look better to us, but they aren't always necessarily better.

I remember telling God I would go anywhere but Dubuque. And that was the sentiment of a lot of our graduates back in 1968. And God wouldn't give me any peace.

[7 : 09] I was offered an associate minister job in Hawaii. I thought, I can reach Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiians, visitors.

Boy, what an opportunity, God. Thank you for this opportunity. He wouldn't give me any peace. So I argued with him, tried to convince him.

And you ever try to convince somebody against what they've already got planned? It can be very, very difficult. Especially God.

He doesn't make any mistakes. Then we consider David. David chose to commit adultery.

With Bathsheba. And the consequence of that, he suffered the death of an infant son in 2 Samuel 12. He suffered a daughter molested by her half-brother in 2 Samuel 13.

[8 : 18] And that son that molested his daughter was killed by her vengeful brother in 2 Samuel 13 as well. A rebellion led by that son who shamed him publicly and whose death brought even more grief to David in 2 Samuel chapters 15 to 18.

And I'm not going to read all of that to you this morning. If you want to read it yourself, you can see it on our website. Some of these chapters are rather long and they take up too much time.

So David made those choices with Lot and David. With both of those gentlemen, illustrating the need for wise choices.

Every day you make a choice on how you're going to spend your money, what it's going to be spent on. You make a choice on where you're going to live.

Having the biggest house in Dubuque is not necessarily wrong if that's where God wants you. But I think that for many of us, including myself, we've made choices over the years when we haven't asked God, is this what you desire?

[9 : 49] Our prayers generally go, I'm going to do this now, God bless me. I'm going to do this now, you make it work out.

Rather than saying, God, what do you want me to do? Where do you want me to go? How do you want me to handle life's situations? Some of us in this auditorium have cancer.

Some in this auditorium have other ailments. And we choose every day how we're going to handle that based upon the Word of God or based upon our fleshly desires.

Paul asks three times that his infirmity would be taken away and God says, my grace is sufficient for thee. I choose to look at it that way because I know that he does the best.

And he's writing my story just as he's writing yours. You choose how you will respond. Some choices greatly affect our lives.

[11 : 09] Some suggestion for making wise choices. And what to do when we have made the wrong choices. We're going to look at those three areas.

Choices which greatly affect our lives. One is choosing Jesus. We don't walk down an aisle and say a prayer and say, okay, I'm saved.

Now I'm going to heaven. I can live however I want. If we walk down an aisle or if we pray in private or if we pray with another person or if we pray in front of a whole assembly of people, what matters is the heart.

Our salvation must come from the heart where we repent of our sins, we look to God, and we trust Him for the victory.

And each step in claiming that victory is a choice. Choosing Jesus.

[12 : 12] Will you follow Jesus or not? Will you become His disciple? A disciple is a student that follows a teacher.

In this case, he had 12 of them that followed Him, lived with Him, ate with Him, learned from Him, and applied that learning to their life.

And were they perfect? No. We still know that they failed, right? Peter denied the Lord three times. So will we become His disciple or will we refuse to accept His gracious offer of salvation?

That too is a choice. Who is going to be your Lord? Is it going to be Jesus Christ or is it going to be yourself?

Here I am, Lord. Now send me. Here I am, Lord. Now use me. Now bless me.

[13 : 29] Both of those are choices that we make. It says in Matthew, chapter 11, verses 28 to 30, Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my load is light.

My deciding to follow, yield to the, or to lead to, my decision to follow the Lord in that decision over Hawaii or come back to Dubuque, when I made that decision to come back to Dubuque, I had peace.

Up until then, I was always questioning, what if this isn't God's plan for me?

What if I miss out on the greatest blessing of God because I chose my life course rather than letting him choose it?

[15 : 04] This is one decision that affects our life more than any other, whether you will follow Jesus or set your own course in life.

It'll determine your place in eternity. It'll have bearing on every other decision you make. As a disciple, you will be concerned with doing His will and obeying His word.

As a disciple, you will not simply do your own thing. In Matthew 28, verses 18 and 20, 18 to 20, it says, And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe or to obey all that I have commanded you.

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Another area that we have to choose that greatly affects our life is our career.

[16 : 28] we make a choice there. My wife and I, we made a choice. When we came back to Dubuque, we started a Bible study, and we made a choice to continue that, even though I was offered a ton of money back then to move to Cedar Rapids and be a systems analyst in a computer department for a big company.

That was a temptation because, after all, God's going to bless you. And so, all that money would have been a real blessing, so God must want me to go to Cedar Rapids, right?

No. It was another choice I had to make. So I stayed in Dubuque, and initially, for quite some time, we actually were supported by a couple of missionaries, if that makes sense.

And we lived off a little bit of what would come in. Our church was small. We didn't have the money. And so, people might slip me a 50 or something like that, and back then, it would go pretty far.

But, we learned to trust God, and you'd go, no groceries in the refrigerator. Let's see what comes in the mail today.

[18 : 00] Because we learned that God is always faithful. He always takes care of His own. And it might not be in the manner you think it should be, but He always takes care of His own.

He always takes care of His own. From a worldly standpoint, your choice is important. For one, the job market's always changing.

the wrong choice could lead to financial ruin or fiscal hardship. More importantly, the choice can have an effect upon your marriage and your family and your service to God.

God. So, we want to make sure that in our choices there, that we're where God wants us, not where we want to be necessarily.

As I look back over the years, I couldn't think of a better place to be and a better people to minister to than where God has me. And had I gone to that place in Hawaii, my life probably would have been miserable in paradise.

[19 : 24] You know? So, we're thankful. We're thankful that God worked that all out. He tells us in Matthew 6.33, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be added

unto you.

All what things? Everything that you have need of. As it says in Philippians, that my God shall supply all, not some or most, but all of you.

your needs in Christ Jesus. So, your needs will be taken care of. Now, that doesn't mean your wants. I wanted a car that ran.

We bought a Gremlin. And for those of you that know cars, that was the ugliest car you've ever seen. And when I pulled it up the driveway, my wife looks, oh, don't tell me you bought that.

We got it cheap enough, though. It was within our budget. Went to a car auction with a guy that was authorized to go there. And all you could smell was gasoline.

[20 : 50] So, all winter and all summer, you had to drive with the windows down. Otherwise, the fumes would overtake you. And nobody could figure out what the problem was. was that God's choice?

I don't know that I prayed about that one. My wife probably wishes I really had. The next area, the third area, is choosing a mate.

And this choice will determine to a great extent your degree of happiness. Proverbs 12, 4 says, An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is as rotten as to his bones.

If you have a permanent bearing on your children, it can have a permanent bearing on your children and their emotional well-being.

John Wesley, the one who started the Methodist churches and who impacted to a great degree the world, he gave that praise, if you will, to God.

[22 : 10] He said, she was the most miserable woman God ever put on earth. And she drove me out of the house with her nagging and complaining. And that's why I was successful to God.

Good choice, bad choice. I would think it was a bad choice. But then I might get, when I get to heaven, I might find out that that was a good choice.

I don't know if he prayed about that or not. But these things, these choices with our mate, my wife and I will be married 49 years this year, and I couldn't have found a better woman.

She's the best woman on planet earth for me. she has been my support, et cetera, et cetera. She even helps me keep my appointments because she knows when I'm supposed to go someplace and I forget to look at my phone and I miss an appointment.

So, choosing a mate is an important thing. Choosing your friends, having close friends is a wonderful blessing. Proverbs 17, 17 says, a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

[23 : 46] But where choosing the right friends is a wonderful blessing, choosing the wrong friends can be a curse. It says in Proverbs 12, 26, the righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

And in 1 Corinthians 15, 33, do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals. And we've all heard of that at different times where somebody says, well, he just fell into the wrong crowd.

well, he didn't fall in, he made a choice to go in. But that again was a choice, wasn't it?

We have to choose those that will lift us up and build us up, and whom will receive our counsel in building up, et cetera.

and then we find our life blessed. Choosing where to live, another choice where Lot made a mistake.

[24 : 59] It appeared to be a sound business decision. But in Genesis 13, verses 10 and 11, it says, Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere.

This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. But the garden of the Lord, the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you go to Zor, and so it was well watered just like it was in Egypt and Lot knew that and he saw the prosperity of that.

And so he made a choice for himself when Abraham gave him the choice, do you want here or there? And he chose there. And that was a bad choice.

So Lot chose the valley for the valley of the Jordan and Lot journeyed eastward and thus they separated from each other.

Excuse me, folks. So Lot made this choice and it greatly affected his life, as it would and will ours.

[26 : 34] and there may be some modern day, if you will, Sodom and Gomorrah that we face.

Sodom and Gomorrah that we need to avoid. And suggestions for making wise decisions, one is to seek the Lord, ask him for wisdom.

He says in James 5 to 8, 1, 5 to 8, he says, but if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

But let him ask in faith without wavering, without doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

Let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

[27 : 49] So, asking wisdom requires diligence. I was diligent in trying to convince God otherwise on my choice, but when I decided to let him make the choice, it changed his life.

And so it will with yours and mine. And I look out, and there are some people here that I trust God has used me to touch, to bless their lives in some way.

And I don't know how that is, I don't know what he's used that I've done or said, but this was the choice that I was meant to take, meant to make, and meant to follow through on.

And it's given me great peace over the year, no matter how hard some of the times have been. I've had peace in that decision.

Commitment, don't hesitate to ask others what they would do. You know, there's wisdom in an abundance of counsel.

[29 : 16] people. So we need to commit our choices to the Lord. In Psalm 37, verses 5 and 6, it says, Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him, and he will do it.

He will bring your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. And in 37, verses 23, 23 to 26, it says, The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and he delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong, because the Lord is one who holds his hand. I have been young, and now I am old, and yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread.

All day long, he is gracious, and he lends, and his descendants are a blessing. His descendants are a blessing, and we make wise decisions with understanding, and if the Lord wills, and we see that, Paul's saying that a number of times, if the Lord wills, I will come and see you in the springtime.

If the Lord wills, I will do this. If the Lord wills, I will do that. So he left his mark in so many places, and Christianity grew in abundance, abundance, because he left that choice with God.

[31 : 13] He chose to listen to God first and foremost, and God gave him the wisdom as to where he was to go and what he was to do, and Christianity spread like wildfire as a result of that one man yielding himself to God, which was a choice.

In James 4, 13 to 15, it says, Come now, you who say today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor. That appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that, if the Lord wills.

And we can ask the Lord, is this what you want? Is this what you want? I don't want it, but is this what you want?

When I came down with some of the ailments that I've been going through the last few years, I said, Lord, I don't like this, but if this is something you want in my story, then you write it.

[32 : 57] So God is the author. He's writing this story. Jesus is the pen and I'm the ink. And I yield to the pen who's getting his message from his father.

Or at least I try to yield. And I find that then the story is going to come out right. It's going to come out just as the father desires it to be.

if I make the choice to yield to the pen of my savior. In responding to wrong choices, in responding to wrong choices, learn from the mistakes of others.

Do what Lot did. Heed and flee. When the angel came, Lot made a choice to leave, to heed God's call from the angel to get out of there and flee.

And as a result of that, he heeded, if you will, the word of God that came through that angel and do what you know to be right without reservation.

[34 : 31] Remember Lot's wife? She was told not to look back. But sometimes we want to look back. Oh, remember the good old days.

But if you went back to the good old days, you'd find out they weren't all that they were meant to be. they didn't have the joy that you can have in Christ.

They didn't have the peace that you can have in Christ. They didn't have the blessing of friends, I mean real friends, that we can have in Christ.

Responding to wrong choices, learn from your mistakes, others' mistakes, and we don't have to look far to find other people that made wrong choices.

We don't belittle them for that because they're in the same growing process that we are. But I can learn from their mistakes, from bad choices that they made, and I can see the results, and I choose not to do the same thing.

[35 : 50] Make those same wrong choices. So do what Peter did after he denied the Lord three times.

He repented and he served, and he made a big difference in the world. Repent if sin is involved, as when Peter denied Christ.

To repent means to turn around from the way you're going, and I'm going this direction, and I'm choosing the call for my life, and I'm choosing what I'm going to do, and I choose the sins I'm going to commit, and when I've committed them, I turn around, and I go in the opposite direction.

I turn around, turn away from the sin, and turn to the Lord Jesus. Do what Paul did to accept and to live.

Accept the forgiveness of Jesus that he provides, and he only provides. In 1 Timothy 1, 12 to 16, Paul writes, I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me because he considered me faithful, putting me into service even though I was formerly a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a violent aggressor, and yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord was more abundant with the faith and the love which are found in Christ Jesus.

[37 : 43] It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among who I am foremost of all, and yet for this reason I found mercy in order that in me as the foremost Jesus Christ might demonstrate his perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in him for eternal life.

Paul was formerly a blasphemer. He killed Christians. Some of us may have committed adultery. Some of us may have stolen something of great value from someone no matter what it was. When we come to Christ, it's forgiven.

heaven. So the devil likes to remind us of our sin, but God wants to remind us of his mercy, and if we repent and turn to him, everything is taken care of.

The board is whiter than snow, as it says in Isaiah 1.18, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

[39 : 07] as white as snow. Forgiven and forgotten. And it's not that God suffers from amnesia, but it's that he chooses never to bring up what we have done in the past.

He makes our board whiter than snow. the wrong thing to do is to continue to remain in the choice you made because of pride or some other reason.

The other wrong choice is to wallow, just to feel sorry for yourself over your guilt and your loss and the sin that you have committed.

so there's some great examples in the Old Testament and great examples in the New Testament as well of ones who sinned and sinned grievously and yet they found forgiveness because they looked to Christ.

They looked to Christ. And so my beloved as we close off this morning I'd like to remind you that you win or you lose by how you choose.

[40 : 46] God has called us to make wise decisions and he's given us the examples and what we need to know in his word.

our responsibility is to yield and seek his face and his forgiveness.

When we do we find that the peace and the joy that we once had can be ours again. So let's bow our heads for a word of prayer.

our father we thank you for the blessing of being able to share your word. I pray father that it has encouraged some pray that it has ministered to your people helping us to realize that every day we make choices some good some bad some of a serious nature some of us some of them in a minor way less serious but father we thank you that whatever choices we've made father you're the healer you're the forgiver you're the redeemer and so father we pray that you would minister to our hearts

and that we might learn from the examples that your holy word shares with us and we thank you in
Jesus name amen