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How to Make Decisions

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How to Make DECISIONS

The president of a large successful bank had gained a reputation for his business skill, taking the bank from a small building on the corner to ownership of the tallest building downtown. As he cleaned out his desk on the day of his retirement, a young vice president came by his office.

"How did you become so successful in banking?" the young man asked.

The elderly banker stopped and thought for a minute, then indicated his answer in two words. "Successful decisions."

The young man pondered the answer. That was not enough. He asked, "How did you learn to make successful decisions?"

The retiring president came around from behind his desk with one word, "Experience."

The young man was persistent. He wanted the secret to becoming a millionaire. "And how do you get experience?"

The gray-headed banker smiled to himself as he reflected on his life, and gave two words to the young hopeful. "Bad decisions."

Everyone makes bad decisions. It is simply part of the fact that we are born in sin and do not have perfect information. Our thought processes are faulty. Bad decisions can cripple a life or destroy a person's future. But when a person learns from his bad decisions he can go on to a successful life.

When I was a college student money was scarce. After working at a Christian camp throughout the summer earning five dollars a week, plus room and board, I was getting ready to return to school for the fall term. I needed shirts. In the bargain basement of a large downtown store, I looked among the 88-cent shirts in the sales bin. I did not think anyone saw me, so I bowed my head and prayed. I wanted God to guide my choice. But a fellow camp

counselor was watching me.

"What are you doing?" my friend asked when I opened my eyes.

"Praying."

"What about?"

"I want God to help me choose the right shirt," I said straightforwardly.

"You don't pray about shirts," my friend chided me. "You pray about a wife and money to go to college... but you don't pray about shirts!"

I was convinced that God was concerned about every detail of my life. I remember one time not having a button on my shirt and I was concerned

about my testimony. "God doesn't want me going around with a button off my shirt," I told my friend. But my friend rebuked me again. He felt a buttonless shirt revealed a character trait. It was not something that concerned God.

Is God concerned about small details? If so, how small?

When a woman goes shopping, is God concerned about every purchase she makes? Two women stand in front of the

canned vegetables. The first woman buys the cheapest green beans because that is all she can afford. The second woman is entertaining her husband's boss and wants to make a good impression. She buys the finest beans, plus the best cut of meat. Should a housewife pray about the purchase of beans and meat?

Ruth was a freshman in college dating two boys. The first was a broad-shouldered, redheaded sophomore, a well-dressed young man who attended all the social functions. Most girls considered him a "good catch." The second boy had a funny name, was short, and did not have money for "good-time" dates. He worked in the college cafeteria, did not own a suit, and spent his spare time studying.

Ruth was faced with a decision of staggering consequence. Does she establish a relationship with the boy who can give her a good time in

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by *Elmer L. Towns*

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college, but is not concerned about getting a job in life? Or does she opt for the future and choose the boy who is success-motivated?

We make decisions every day of our lives, beginning with the alarm clock. "Will I get out of bed?" We decide to get up or to enjoy a few extra minutes in the sack. Most of us know people who help us with our decisions. When the alarm goes off your wife says, "You better get out of bed." Sometimes she puts obligations on your decision-making process. "If you don't get up you will lose your job!"

On the other side, the "positive thinkers" say, "Make up your mind before you make up your bed." These are usually success-oriented people with a healthy attitude toward making decisions.

Still others let circumstances control their lives. They yield to events around them and let fate determine their destiny. This is wrong. Our choices should determine our lives.

God made us with the ability to choose. He did not make us His robots, nor did He predetermine all our choices. God did not make a blueprint for our lives and expect us to conform to it. God created people who would love Him out of choice and worship Him out of their free will. Adam and Eve, our early parents, were creatures of choice, as we are, and their choices were of great consequence to us.

The power to choose is the freedom we love the most. Ask those enslaved behind the Iron Curtain or in prison. They will testify that they miss the power to choose or direct their lives.

Victor Franckle was imprisoned in a German concentration camp during the Second World War. He was interrogated, beaten, and humiliated. Franckle was stripped naked and lost all of his possessions, yet he said, "They can take everything away from me but my power to choose how I will think about them or react to them." The power of choice made him the ultimate victor. His choice made him human and kept him living.

Choices are inevitable. Even when we postpone decisions we actually choose not to decide.

A minister went into a restaurant with several colleagues and played "musical menus." The ministers were reluctant to choose a meal. My friend chose the worst selection. "I want broccoli, and liver quiche." The others followed. "Sure, I will have that." After all had chosen and the waitress began to walk away my friend changed his order. "I'll have a cheeseburger and French fries." Those following someone else's decisions were not reluctant to change.

Choices are like throwing a stone in the pond. The stone quickly disappears but the ripples continue. We quickly make a decision, and the event sinks like the stone in the pond. But the conse-

quences continue. Our choices affect us and the people around us.

We should make our decisions based on the lordship of Christ, not on the lordship of self, not as those conformed to the world, but as those who are transformed by the power of Christ. When we make decisions based on the Lord Jesus Christ, we make them according to the Word of God.

Spend time in prayer. Christians should pray about major decisions. But the real question is, "When did you pray about it?" If you are really living in the center of God's will, you should pray about every decision before you even know you have a decision to make. You should pray about everything you do every day. The more serious a decision, the longer you should pray about it before making it.

Many Christians pray only when they get into trouble. All too often we want a sovereign God to get us out of a mess. At that point we are willing to make a biblical decision. Pray daily for the guidance of God in every area of life.

Read the appropriate Scripture. This does not mean to base a decision on one text. Base decisions on the whole counsel of God. Know the teaching of Scripture and apply it to your problem. Then look

for a verse that reflects that truth.

Do not open the Bible, spin your finger in a circle over it, and land blindly on a verse—like a plane taking any port in a storm. That is the wrong way to look for spiritual guidance. You might be surprised at what you could prove with just one verse of Scripture.

Base your decision on the entire teaching of God's Word. If God's truth is right at one place, it will be right at another place. God's Word will not disagree with itself.

Think through the consequences of your decisions. We make many of our decisions in the flesh. We reflect on the short side of the ledger sheet. Do not use "stopwatch" thinking in making a decision. Use "calendar," long-range reflection on the consequences of a decision.

The first way to think through the consequences is to ask, "How will this decision affect me?" Ask how it will affect you physically, spiritually, and socially, but most of all how it will affect your family.

A father got a promotion and a large raise. He moved his family to another state, but could not find a biblical church. Previously, they had been growing in the Lord and serving Christ. But without the support of a good church they became backslidden. He based his decision on finances, not in light of the total consequences for him and his family. Before a father makes a

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Decisions

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move concerning his job, home, or even a vacation, he needs to ask how it will affect his family.

Lot moved to the well-watered plains of Sodom and Gomorrah because it was the best place in the area (Gen. 13:10-11). However, his decision destroyed his children, and he lost his wife. He made a wrong decision and lost everything. Even though Lot got out of Sodom with his life, his family suffered eternal consequences.

Consider all the options before making a decision. No person will ever be perfect in making decisions. However, a person should gather as many facts as possible before making any decisions. He should look at both sides of the issue. One of the best ways to make a decision is to list the different options on two sides of a sheet of paper. List everything, the assets and liabilities, not just the things that you want to do.

List the consequences. What will happen if I decide to move? What will happen if I stay? You cannot make a heavenly decision when you consider only the earthly fate. List the biblical principles and values on your sheet of paper.

Yes, you ought to read the Scriptures, and you ought to pray, but do not be mystical in decision making. Ask God to guide you, and then do all your earthly homework. Do not ask God to give you a heavenly decision if you have not done your earthly homework. Nor can you make an earthly decision without heavenly insight. Until you have your feet on the ground, you cannot look into heaven.

Look at all the facts and do not wait for hunches, urges, or inclinations. Be careful when your hunches go against facts. Good decisions will lead to a good life.

Some people go from one bad decision to another. They have never learned to make good decisions, so they cannot give good direction to their lives. Like a woman who goes from one bad husband to another, some people think they have "bad luck." There is no such thing as bad luck, just bad decisions.

Sometimes people make bad decisions because their timing is wrong. Most lives have mountains and valleys. We live by emotional highs and lows. Be careful of making important decisions when you are in the valley. Do not make major decisions when you are physically, mentally, or socially down. Learn to make your decisions when you are going up, not headed down. Decisions made in the darkness usually throw a person into a deeper valley.

To make good decisions, you must think right, feel right, see right, and be right.

A good decision should have the confirmation of Christian leaders. Talk to God's people. Ask them what they think about your decision. Pray with them. When you have to make major decisions, call your pastor or counsel with a spiritual leader. Tell them where you are in your walk with God and ask them what you should do.

To make good decisions, make Jesus Christ first in your life. When Christ is number four—or anything but number one—everything else will be wrong. If you start right with Jesus Christ, everything else will be right.

Three decisions will determine happiness in your life. First, decide to serve God, the Creator of heaven and earth, with all your heart. Second, decide the type of person you will marry and implement that decision. Third, decide the type of career that fits your gifts, training, and ambitions. Then pursue it with all your might. These three things will determine the happiness and joy in your life more than anything else.

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received your message in the form it was sent. Make sure the child understands the meaning of words like *selfish, mean, disrespectful, malicious*, and the like.

Third, take questions. Give the

child a chance to tell you how he feels and to ask whatever questions he has about his bad behavior. This is not negotiating or proposing situational ethics. It is simply an opportunity for the child to ask, "But, why is it wrong?" Then a parent can back up and start over again.

Children do not think like adults, and as long as adults don't think like children and assume that everyone knows what they know, problems of this type will be minimal.

The discipline method may not be appropriate. This final point is clearly the most important. Parents must give themselves permission to be flexible, not bound to one method alone. Parenting has always been a trial-and-error process. Discipline is no different. If a method is not changing behavior, *change the method!* Methods are not etched in stone. Spanking is not the only way to deal with child misbehavior. Children need parents who have the inner strength to be flexible while still being strong.

In 2 Timothy 1:7 Paul says, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." As responsible Christian parents, we must recognize that God gave us a brain as well as a hand to use in disciplining children. No one method is suitable for every form of child misbehavior. We express our love for our children by being powerful enough to direct them along the right pathways. We use our power wisely when we use the brain God gave us to choose the method we feel led to by the Holy Spirit.

God-given power, biblical love, and a mind attuned to the leading of the Holy Spirit will inevitably lead to effective and successful discipline.

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