

Life is Made by Choices
Deuteronomy 30:15-20
January 12, 2020

The life we have is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the choices we make. Some choices don't have lasting impact, but some do. Such as "Who I will marry," "What career path I will take," "In what country will I live." Each time we make a choice we cultivate our own path.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1926-2004), who became famous because she came up with the idea of "stages of grief," once said, "I believe that we are solely responsible for our choices, and we have to accept the consequences of every deed, word, and thought throughout our lifetime."¹ She is right that with our choices we determine our destiny.

An American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910) once said that some bad choices can actually make our lives a living hell. He said, when theology discusses hell it refers to the punishment we endure after we die, but by the choices we make we fashion our character. If we fashion our character in the wrong way, our life can be a living hell.² The accumulation of our choices not only determines our character but also the quality of our lives.

We can't escape from that. Making decisions is a part of life, yet it can be perilous.

It is dangerous because we always have the risk of making bad or unwise decisions. Some choices appear to be wise at the time, but later we realize that they had unforeseen consequences. The possibility of making mistakes is always present.

However, the good thing is that most of mistakes are correctible. Even if we make some serious mistakes, we can correct them. Yes, we will suffer the consequences of the mistakes, and it will take a while to correct them. It may cost us a huge price, but still we can correct them. Because we make many decisions in life, even if we make some mistakes, we can make other decisions to redirect our lives.

¹ <https://www.success.com/13-quotes-about-making-life-choices/>

² Maxie Dunnam, "To Live is to Choose", www.esermons.com

In decision making, there are some important question to consider. “How will you make your decisions?” What are your criteria for decision making? What is the end result you are looking for? In other words, “What is the most important thing you will consider as you make your decision?”

This is precisely what Moses is saying to the Israelites (and indeed to us) in his message recorded in Deuteronomy 30.

By God’s grace and power, and with his help, Moses has led the Israelites out of Egypt; he has led them through the wilderness. He has brought them to the edge of the Promised Land.

Moses is old and weak and tired. He knows that he can’t enter the Promised Land with them. God has already told him that his journey would end before the Israelites would enter the Promised Land. So, Moses gives the Israelites his final instructions. He tells them that when they get into the Promised Land:

- they will be tempted to chase after false gods,
- they will be tempted to forget about God and his love,
- they will be tempted to forget his covenant and his commandments.

So, he begs and implores them not to choose a destructive way of living, but to remember God’s love and choose to live with God!

If Moses were here today, that is precisely what he would say to us: “Remember God’s love, remember God’s promise that he would always be with you. No matter what happens in life, remember God’s power, and remember God’s way. Choose to live with God each and every day.”

In the early part of the New Year, I would like to share with you two things to consider.

First, trusting God gives us strengths to face all challenges.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells of a moment when he was a prisoner in a Soviet Prison Camp and he was on the verge of giving up all hope. He was working 12 hours a day at hard labor. He was existing on a starvation diet. He didn’t have much to eat. He had become gravely ill. The doctors were predicting his death... and frankly, he didn’t care whether he lived or died. In fact, he thought it would be better to die than to live in those conditions.

One afternoon, while shoveling sand under a blazing sun, he simply stopped working. He did so, knowing that the guards would beat him severely – perhaps to death.

But, he didn't care anymore. He felt that he just could not go on. At that moment, he saw another prisoner, a fellow Christian, moving toward him cautiously. With his cane, the man quickly drew a cross in the sand... and then quickly erased it.

When he saw it, Solzhenitsyn felt all the hope of the Gospel flood through his soul. He couldn't explain how, but he felt peace and renewed strength. The cross and what it stood for gave him the strength and courage to endure not only that day, but also every day until he was released from the prison.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was saved that day by the sign of the cross. That quick reminder of God's love and power gave him the strength to hold on and to go on. The hymn writer put it like this: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of Earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace."

Trusting God gives us strength to face all the challenges we face.

Second, because God loves us and he is always with us, we can choose to live in confidence.

In life we will have moments of fear and anxiety. As we get older, we can have more of those moments. When our health, stamina and energy level declines, we can experience great concern and anxiety.

But I want to let you know that one of the most repeated messages in the Bible is "Fear Not!" God says to us "Don't be afraid no matter what you face in life. I am with you always, in this life and in the next life."

Why would God repeat this message, this command over and over again? Repetition implies importance. The Bible repeats this message, because we need to hear it over and over again.

This past week we have heard the news about a series of earthquakes in Puerto Rico. Some serious damage occurred and people's lives were turned upside down. Earthquakes hit without warning. Lives can be disrupted at any moment.

We also heard about instability in the Middle East. Life is unpredictable and calamity can happen at any time. So “fear” or “anxiety” is very much a part of us, and we need to be reminded of God’s constant presence with us.

Someone actually counted how many times the Bible says “Fear Not” or “Do not be afraid.” He discovered that there are 365 “Fear Not” messages in the Bible.³ Isn’t that interesting? 365 Fear Not messages; one for every day of the year. The point is that “Because God loves us and he is always present with us we can relax and live in confidence.”

Candler School of Theology at Emory University is named in honor of Bishop Warren Candler (1857-1941). When Bishop Candler was about to die, he was asked if he were afraid to die, if he were afraid to cross the river of death.

Bishop Candler responded with these words. “No, I’m not afraid at all, because my Father owns the land on both sides of the river.”⁴

He is right. God has a full control in this life and the next.

In this New Year, let us choose to live with God. Because of God’s love, his grace, and his constant presence, let us trust the Lord and live in confidence each and every day!

³ From James W. Moore’s sermon “Choose Life”, www.esermons.com

⁴ Ibid.