

Family Seasons: Lesson 2

The Choices We Make

Memory Text: “And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15)

Setting The Stage: British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith during WW I once spent a weekend at the Waddesdon estate of the 19th-century Rothschild family. One day, as Asquith was being waited on at teatime by the butler, the following conversation ensued: "Tea, coffee, or a peach from off the wall, sir?" "Tea, please," answered Asquith. "China, India, or Ceylon, sir?" asked the butler. "China, please." "Lemon, milk, or cream, sir?" "Milk, please," replied Asquith." "Jersey, Hereford, or Shorthorn, sir?" asked the butler.

Choices. Life is filled with them. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed at night our day is filled with them. In fact, some sources suggest adults make 35,000 choices per day. If the average person sleeps 7 hours a night, that would mean we make roughly 2,000 decisions an hour or one decision ever two seconds. That doesn't sound too unreasonable if you think about the choices you made this morning, and the choices you're presently making sitting in this Bible study!

Most of our choices are pretty routine, while others can be life changing. We are who we are because of our choices, and we are where we are because of our choices. It can be said then that life's choices are important. There are consequences to our decisions. So it's vital that we are careful when making decisions so that we make the right ones.

Sunday – Free Will, Free Choice

Titus 1:1, 2; Matthew 22:35-37

There's a particular philosophy that forms the basis of certain secular counseling techniques entitled "Determinism." This philosophy states that a person is born into this world as a piece of clay or a blank slate, and that various forces in the environment (parents, teachers, peers, workplace, etc.) act as potters or scribes to shape or write upon the person and, in essence, determine to a large extent who he or she is. B. F. Skinner of the 20th C popularized this concept. He completely ruled out self-determination and freedom as factors in what a person becomes.

There is a Christian belief that is somewhat similar and it states that a person doesn't determine their eternal destiny, but that before they were born, God has

chosen who will be saved and who will be lost no matter the choices made. This is called Calvinism, or better known as predestination. It's not a doctrine taught in the Bible.

What the Bible does teach, and it is promoted and taught by Seventh-day Adventist's, is that we are each given free will—the freedom and responsibility to choose and determine our own destinies. The Bible also teaches that it is God's will that everyone be saved (2 Peter 3:9), but He cannot and will not choose for us (John 3:16), although He has given tremendous enticements to choose His offer of salvation. One of those allurements encompasses an understanding of God's pursuit of man and His pre-determined plan to do so before mankind fell.

Titus 1:1, 2: "Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began."

There are multiple Bible verses that clearly reveal that if anyone wishes to experience the wonders and pleasures of salvation a choice has to be made (think Adam & Eve for instance). God neither gives it to us if we don't want it as well as removes it from us if we do. And not just at the beginning of the journey do we engage our choice, but we must daily renew our commitment to serve Him and live for Him.

Matthew 22:35-37: "Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' "

Love is not love unless it is freely given. Genuine love cannot be coerced; it can only be given and received by choice. No one wants to be loved by someone else because they were forced to do so. It wouldn't be true love if that were the case.

"Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do." (Education, p. 17)

God has given each of us the divine right of choice. It's a mark that we are made in the image of God, and therefore, we should make our decisions with this in mind. When making important decisions our thought should be, "Will this choice honor my Maker, will it allow God to recreate me into the image of His divine Son, and will it keep me on the highway to heaven?" So how can the image of God be preserved and restored in me on a choice-by-choice basis?

A man once asked Michelangelo about his statue of David. The man inquired, "How did you create such a masterpiece from a rough chunk of marble?" Michelangelo responded, "I simply chipped away at everything that didn't look like David." We

can make decisions to do only those things that look like Jesus and purpose to chip away from our lives anything that doesn't. I thank God that He works in me to both will and do of His good pleasure.

The greatest decision we could ever make is that of choosing to give our lives to the Lord, to let Him be Savior and Lord, and to surrender daily to His Word and to His plans for our lives. There is absolutely no regret in making such a decision and renewing that decision each and every day! This decision will greatly impact all other decisions you make in your life.

Monday – Making The Right Choices

1 Thessalonians 5:17; Matthew 7:24, 25; Proverbs 3:5, 6; 15:22

In every single thing you do, you are choosing a direction. Your life is a product of choices. Then how important we make the right decisions!

The department head was a wise, friendly old man, and during an interview in his office one day he was asked, "Sir, what is the secret of your success?" He said, "Two words." "And, sir, what are they?" "Right decisions." "But how do you make right decisions?" "One word." He responded. "And, sir, what is that?" "Experience." "And how do you get experience?" "Two words." "And, sir, what are they?" "Wrong decisions."

But it doesn't always have to be that way. We don't always have to learn the hard way. How do we know how to make the right decisions? Is convenience, cultural trends, peer pressure, emotions, habits, or mere preferences reliable guides? The following verses give us general guidelines in our quest to make right decisions:

1 Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray without ceasing." (cp. Jas 1:5)

Matthew 7:24, 25: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock."

Proverbs 3:5, 6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

Proverbs 15:22: "Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established."

In every important decision, how important it is that we spend extra time in prayer, that our choices don't lead us to violate God's Word in any way. We should lean heavily upon the Lord and surrender our wills to His, and take time to sit and talk with wise and godly individuals to hear what they have to say on the subject.

Tuesday – Choosing Friends

Proverbs 18:24; 12:26; 22:24, 25; 1 Corinthians 15:33

One of the most important decisions we will make has to do with who we will make our friend. It's not common to go in search of a friend. Most of the time friendships develop naturally as we spend time with people who enjoy some of the same things we do.

Some complain because while they would like to make a friend or have more friends, they're apparently not finding anyone being friendly to them. Others struggle to make friends and find themselves alone because they don't realize that their negative attitude or overbearing spirit drives people away. How does a person make a friend?

Proverbs 18:24: "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

It's sometimes easy to complain about the unfriendliness of others, but an important question we must ask ourselves if we desire friends is, "Am I friendly? Do I take initiative? Am I pleasant to be around? Do I display those qualities and characteristics that I enjoy in others that draws me to them?"

Choosing the right types of friends is also important. Does the Bible offer any guiding principles in the selection of friends? One principle we didn't highlight when reading Proverbs 18:24 has to do with loyalty—a friend that sticks closer than a brother. This person sticks with you through thick and thin, and loves you in spite of some of the flaws that are apparent in your life.

Jonathan was that type of friend to David. Jonathan could have been a bitter enemy of David. He was next in line to the throne of his father Saul, but God chose David instead. Jonathan understood that his father proved unworthy of his call and became a close friend of David. He even sought to preserve David's life from his own father. "Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." (1 Samuel 18:1)

"If we keep uppermost in our minds the unkind and unjust acts of others, we shall find it impossible to love them as Christ has loved us; for there are few persons who do not on close acquaintance reveal unamiable traits of character. Even the best of us have these unlovely traits; and in selecting friends we should choose those who will not be driven away from us when they learn that we are not perfect. Mutual forbearance is called for. We should love and respect one another notwithstanding the faults and imperfections that we cannot help seeing; for this is the Spirit of Christ. Humility and self-distrust should be cultivated, and a patient tenderness with the faults of others. This will kill out all narrowing selfishness and make us large-hearted and generous."
(The Signs of the Times, March 5, 1885)

Proverbs 12:26: “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

Proverbs 22:24, 25: “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.”

1 Corinthians 15:33: “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” (I now use a fork to cut my food!)

The influence of a friend can rub off on us if we’re not careful. That’s why it’s incredibly important to choose friends wisely. Some of us may even have to reconsider some of the choices we’ve made. We may have to spend less time with a particular person because they’re not good for us. But God wants us to always exert a positive influence over others, rather than the negative behavior or attitude of others exerting an influence over us (Matt. 5:13).

And finally, making friends and the developments of friendships should be done with eternity in mind. Are we making friends for eternity; forever friends?

Wednesday – Choosing A Life Partner

James 1:23-25; Genesis 24

Probably the most important decision you will ever make if you choose to get married is deciding on a life partner. Adam and Eve had it easy in that God gave them to each other. Wouldn’t it be nice if it were that easy? Instead we are confronted with the question of whether to get married or not get married, and if we think we should get married, then who do we choose from among the “plenty of fish in the sea”? Outside of the choice to live for the Lord, the question of a spouse will almost always be the most consequential choice some will have to make.

Perhaps we’ve all made our mental or literal lists of the “ideal” person we could spend the rest of our lives with, and that is a good and healthy thing to do. The best and safest thing to do first when considering this question is checking with the One who created marriage in the first place to see what advice He has to offer. What guidelines does the Bible offer that we should put into practice when looking for a life partner?

James 1:23-25: “ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

Besides looking for the right person to marry, we need to be the right person to marry. And here is a principle that will not only safeguard your choice of partner, but will also revive a stale marriage. Are you the right person?

For a young (or not so young) person: have you made your decision for Christ? Do you have your basic studies behind you? Do you have a plan for your life? Do you have work experience? Do you know how to manage money? Do you practice selflessness? Are you flexible, teachable, and humble? Are you clean and tidy and have self-respect? Do you have a healthy outlook on sex and sexuality? Are you grown up and not afraid to face life's challenges? Do you treat the opposite sex with respect? Do you know how to get along with others? Are you a team player? Are you content not to get married?

For those who are married: how is your relationship with Christ? Are you interested and involved in the life of your spouse? Are you practicing selflessness? Are you fueling your marriage with spontaneous acts of love and thoughtfulness? Do you treat your spouse with love and respect?

Not only does God want us to be the right partner, but there are other aspects of choosing that we should also consider. The story of Isaac and Rebekah can teach us a thing or two:

(1) Isaac trusts others in the choice of a spouse (Gen. 24:1-4) – trust God and accept the wise counsel of others; (2) a woman from his idolatrous homeland is not considered an option (Gen. 24:6) – choose someone who loves the Lord and believes as you do; (3) Isaac was meditating (perhaps in prayer) the evening Rebekah arrived (Gen. 24:63) – be in much prayer!; and (4) all parties seemed pleased with the arrangement – it's important that those you love and trust are in the most part happy with your choice.

Also read Adventist Home, section three, entitled, "Choosing the Life Partner" pp. 43-75. Here's a sample: *"Examine carefully to see if your married life would be happy or inharmonious and wretched. Let the questions be raised, Will this union help me heavenward? Will it increase my love for God? And will it enlarge my sphere of usefulness in this life? If these reflections present no drawback, then in the fear of God move forward."* (Adventist Home, p. 45)

Thursday – Choosing A Course

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11; 1 Timothy 6:10

Another important decision we all have to face relates to what we want to do with our lives in terms of a job or career. Unless we were born with a silver spoon in our mouths, most of us will need to "earn our keep." There is nothing degrading about work (inside or outside the home). As a matter of fact, our lives can have added

meaning and purpose when we work. God gave creation's first couple the task of caring for the Garden (Gen. 2:15).

The average employed individual changes careers 3 to 4 times in their lifetime, so the question of what one should do for work is not only considered at the earlier stages of our lives, but at other stages of our lives too.

What mistake did Solomon make, and how can we be careful not to do something similar? **Ecclesiastes 2:1-11**. Solomon poured his life into his work and made the accumulation and building of things his main object in life. One could say he made an idol out of His work and made possessions his one true love. In the end, Solomon saw that it all was "vanity." He finally came to his senses by realizing that there was more to life than projects and possessions. (Man in Toronto who planned to retire by 45 by working like a mad man until then.)

1 Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

We must work to earn a living. That's a given. But it's never worth neglecting meaningful relationships in order to get rich. How many children or spouses would have preferred a humbler lifestyle over an impoverished relationship with the father? How many people, at the end of their lives, wished they had spent more time in the office and less time with their family?

It's vital that we keep first things first, that we prioritize our lives and determine what are the most important things, if we haven't already done so. But sometimes we need to check ourselves, to look at our lives to make sure we're on track. Jesus desires our lives to exhibit balance, but more than that, He wants for our lives to be holy, healthy, and happy—a reflection of His goodness.

We've all made decisions we regretted making. Some of us still live with the "scars" of those choices today. Some of our choices have hurt the people we love, or have brought about adverse circumstances that were nearly impossible to reverse. And when you're reminded of them, how you wish you could have it to do all over again and do it right the next time. I thank God for the mercy of the Lord. You will find forgiving family members and others whom you may have wronged, and praise God for that, but even if they may not forgive you, there is a Savior who is all about second chances. May God help us daily to make the best and right choices.