

The challenge of **Making right choices**

By Dave Batty

“I was only 18, and it was the very first time I had sex,” states Tracey. “I soon discovered I was pregnant. My mom said I had to get an abortion or get out of the house. I didn’t see any other choices—so I got an abortion.”

Some of us can relate to having to make tough choices as a teenager—only to have those choices haunt you for the rest of your life.

Choices don’t get easier for parents. One mom came to me, “I just don’t know what to do. My son wants to come home, and if I say ‘No’ I’m afraid I will be failing to show God’s unconditional love.”

She went on to share how two years earlier their 16 year old son had left home, having made choices to use drugs and alcohol, and hang out with the wrong crowd of friends. Now he was calling, asking mom to let him come home.

- ❖ **What is the most important decision of your life?**
- ❖ **Will good decisions get you into heaven?**
- ❖ **What strategies will help you make good choices?**
- ❖ **What place does accountability have in making good choices?**

When her son left two years earlier, it was because he refused to honor 3 simple rules she had given him. So I asked her, “Now that he wants to come home, has he agreed to honor your rules?”

“Oh, no,” she responded, “he has given us his own set of rules.”

I assured her that she was certainly responding in a godly way by

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saying “No” to his request. Making right choices can be painful. Wrong choices can sometimes feel so right.

Sallie Culbreth, founder of Committed to Freedom, conducts seminars for survivors of sexual abuse. She talks about the destructiveness of bitterness, which is a common response among these survivors. But choosing bitterness often has unintended consequences.

She illustrates bitterness this way: It’s like buying rat poison, eating it yourself, and then waiting for the rat to die.

How many of our choices are bringing damage into our lives?

One thing is clear as we face life each day. We all must make decisions, and accept responsibility for each decision we make. Each small decision will have an impact—and many times the long term consequences are far greater than we anticipated at the time of the decision.

Just as one small match can start a huge forest fire, so one small decision in our lives can start a firestorm of consequences that impact many people beyond ourselves.

The most important decision of your life

When you back up and take a look at your whole life, what is the most important decision you will ever make? Some might say—the person I marry. Or, the career path I choose. Or, the day I narrowly escaped death—whether a car accident or the decision to live, rather than commit suicide.

We all face decisions that have a major impact on our lives, but none have greater impact than making the decision to follow Jesus. This decision impacts where you spend eternity—nothing has greater significance!

After a long life of leading the nation of Israel, Joshua put forth a bold challenge to the whole nation—“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . as for me

and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15 NIV

Making a decision to follow Jesus—it’s a personal choice—no one can make it for you. No one else’s good choice will count for your failure to make this right choice.

Timing is so significant

No one enjoys making wrong choices. Some live in such fear of making wrong choices, they put off making decisions, waiting until they are sure it is the right decision. But many choices have a time limit.

It does little good to say, “this is how I want to raise my children,” when they have already grown up and left home. “Monday morning quarterbacks” always have the perfect choices on which plays to run—but the game was Saturday. That’s when the choices made a real difference in life.

Many people dream of what it would be like to be rich, and have all the money they wanted. One rich man lived in luxury until the day he

died. Tragically he ended up in hell. But now, in hell, he believes all the right things, but it’s too late.

The rich man in hell pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back to witness to his family. (Luke 16:27-31 NIV)

Now the rich man believes in evangelism, and missions, and the reality of hell, and the importance of

Are you allowing your busy schedule to distract you from making the most important decisions in your life?

preparing for heaven, and miracles—people being raised from the dead.

But all these important and correct beliefs were too late for this man. When he was alive, he allowed other things to distract him from making the most important decision in his life. He failed to influence his family to make the same important decision—to put Christ in first place in their lives.

Does it take more than salvation?

If the most important decision a person can make is the choice to become a Christian, is that all it takes to make it to heaven? God has a bigger plan for your life than simply saying a prayer to accept Him into your life. Jesus calls for a decision to “follow Him,” talking about a lifestyle involving decisions on a daily basis.

Each day offers new opportunities to make choices—and these choices will have a dramatic impact on our lives, and those around us. To follow Jesus involves making right choices on a daily basis.

A strategy for making good choices

So what is the best strategy to use in making good decisions? Some say that experience is the best teacher. But is it? For sure it is one of the most painful and expensive teachers! How much better it is to learn from the experiences of others!

That’s one of the reasons why God gave us the Bible—so we can learn from their right choices—and wrong choices.

Here are three keys to help you make better decisions.

1. Look at the consequences before making the decision

It doesn’t take long for most of us to remember a situation where we made a decision, and then later began to see the negative consequences of that decision. It’s easy to convince ourselves—“just once” won’t hurt. But “just once” experiences do make a difference. Eve believed the devil “just once” and ate the forbidden fruit, and brought sin into the whole world. We all live today with the consequences of her one decision.

Good decisions don’t get you into heaven

Many people look at all the good decisions they have made and say, “I’m living a good, moral life. What right do you have to accuse me of being a sinner?”

But admission to heaven is not based on living a good life—it’s based on one decision—did you ask Jesus Christ to become the leader of your life?

A drug dealer in one city became very concerned about one young lady addicted to drugs. He told her, “You are really messed up. You need help.” So he drove Yvonne over 200 miles to a Teen Challenge center and personally

helped enroll her in this program. She stayed, God transformed her life, and today she is a pastor in Los Angeles. Her ministry is touching many others today because of one concerned drug dealer.

When Yvonne goes to spend eternity in heaven, she will have a drug dealer to thank for bringing her to Teen Challenge where she met Christ. There may be thousands of others in heaven who will owe a debt of gratitude to that drug dealer’s right choice to get help for Yvonne. But none of these changed lives will help that drug dealer get into heaven.

Crystal was only 11 years old when she made a choice. “I saw my sister and her friends inhaling a white powder. Although I knew it was wrong, I joined them. This one bad choice started me on a 32 year addiction to heroin and other drugs. In my addiction, I contracted HIV.”

Many like Crystal can recall decisions made out of curiosity that brought devastating consequences into their lives.

One of the powerful ways to avoid these painful consequences is to stop before you make the decision and ask yourself, “What are the potential consequences if I make this decision?” Being honest at this moment can be a powerful tool for making right choices.

We live in a day when so many people are unwilling to take responsibility for their choices. They want to do whatever they wish, and yet not have to deal with the consequences of their irresponsible choices.

Tracey, mentioned earlier, simply wanted to have a good time with her friends. But her decisions one night resulted in a pregnancy and an abortion, and a lifetime of regrets. None of these consequences were in her mind that night when she was having a good time.

The Bible is full of stories showing the consequences of making right decisions and of making wrong decisions. Joseph, a slave in Potiphar’s home, was faced with a choice when Potiphar’s wife asked him to sleep with her. Joseph’s right decision brought more pain into his life—and a prison sentence. He made a choice to preserve his relationship with God rather than please the wife of his boss.

Right decisions do not always bring pleasant consequences. And wrong choices do not always lead to

immediate consequences of pain and disaster. Many times the negative consequences are not immediate and we convince ourselves that it’s OK. But King David’s life is a clear example of the long term consequences of a wrong decision. The story is told in 2 Samuel 11-12.

His decision to sleep with Bathsheba had the immediate result—he had a good time. But in the months that followed the consequences piled up—Bathsheba was pregnant. He tried to cover his sin by having her husband come back from the battle front. When that didn’t work, he conspired with his generals to kill Uriah. Each of these consequences involved other people in an ever widening circle of people.

Still today, people look back at David’s sin to justify their own sins. We can look at a decision, and deceive ourselves into believing that

there will be no negative consequences. But if we really are honest with ourselves, we would admit that sin is sin.

Let’s face it—with most decisions you cannot know all the future consequences of that decision. But you can take time and consider the potential consequences. This pause to count the cost in advance can be a powerful tool in helping you make good decisions.

2. Ask God for help in making right choices

God wants to help each one of us. Looking to God for help as you make important decisions is always a great strategy. God’s wisdom is always going to help you make right choices. And He invites us to ask for His help. See James 1:5-6. We do not have to wait for a loud booming voice from heaven, or divine handwriting on the wall.

The desire of our heart needs to be, “God I want to do what You want me to do. I want my choice to be Your choice. I need your help!”

Sometimes God speaks to us with His peace in our hearts. But the most common way you can discover God’s wisdom is by reading the Bible, asking yourself, “How does this scripture speak to the decision I am facing?”

Hebrews 12:1-2 states that God has prepared a race for us to run, and the key to our success is to fix our eyes on Him. Ask yourself, “What would Jesus do if He were in my shoes, faced with this decision?” Taking time to ask that question can be a powerful tool in helping us make right decisions. Not just the big decisions in life—but also in choosing the words to use in responding to everyday situations with family and work associates.



How many times have you made a series of small decisions that all seemed fine at the moment, and only later did you realize you had painted yourself into a corner? I’m sure this man thought he was doing a good job with his painting, but he failed to think ahead and ask himself, “Where are my decisions going to take me?”

Each small stroke with the paint brush seemed to be a good decision. In your life, small decisions can seem right, but have you taken the time to pause and look ahead. “Where will I be a day from now, a year from now, or even farther down the road?”

3. Make yourself accountable to someone else

Making yourself accountable to another person who has a heart for God can be an important tool in helping you make right choices. However, being accountable to another person does not mean they make the decision for you.

Accountability does not mean the other person controls your decisions. It means you give a report to them of the decisions you have made, or are planning to make. It means that you are ready to give the hard answers explaining how you arrived at this decision, and why you are making this choice.

If you know you have a hard time making right choices with your money, then making yourself accountable to another person. Preparing and following a budget can be a key part in learning to make wise choices in this area of your life.

If this step is going to work, you have to be the one saying, "I want to be accountable to you." Yes, we can be accountable to God, but many times it also helps to make ourselves accountable to another person.

Making right choices will be a challenge until the day we die. But the more we make right choices, the more we will enjoy God's blessings in our lives. The more we make wrong choices, the more we will reap the painful, destructive consequences of those decisions. Most days we only face small choices. But each of these choices add up to a lifetime of consequences, usually much bigger than what we anticipated.

We will never reach the state of always making perfect choices. But as we seek to put God first in every decision of our lives, we can rest on the assurance that He will continue to direct us each day.

Making right choices Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. If you have already made a decision to become a Christian, tell when and how you came to make that decision.
2. Read Luke 16:19-31.
 - A. What areas of your life have you found easy to ignore because of your busy daily activities?
 - B. As you reflect over your past, are there any areas of big regrets regarding decisions you made in the past?
3. Read 2 Samuel 11:1-5 (Read chapters 11 & 12 if you have time.)
 - A. What were the consequences that King David failed to consider before he slept with Bathsheba?
 - B. How easy is it for you to ignore the consequences of your decisions when you are tempted to sin?
4. Read James 1:5. What are the challenges you face in seeking to understand what God wants you to do when faced with a decision?
5. What has been your experience in making yourself accountable to another person? How has this helped you in making wise choices?
6. What is one area in your life today where you need to make yourself accountable to another person?



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