

Joke: A minister waited in line to have his car filled with gas just before a long holiday weekend. The attendant worked quickly, but there were many cars ahead of him. Finally, the attendant motioned him toward a vacant pump.

“Reverend,” said the young man, “I’m so sorry about the delay. It seems as if everyone waits until the last minute to get ready for a long trip.”

The minister chuckled, “I know what you mean. It’s the same in my business.”

Show video: The Field of Eternity

What do you think is the difference between those who are really fulfilled in life and the rest of the world?

Those who are struggling relationally, just trying to hold their marriage together or keep their kids on the right path. Those who are struggling financially and don't believe that they could be generous. They want to be, but they don't feel like they could be. The one's who know there's something more in life but can't quite find just what it is. I'm talking about the one's who feel empty and the inside.

What is the difference between those and them?

Well, let me tell you what it's not. Contrary to what many people think. The difference is not their intelligence. It's not their talent. It's not even their appearance, after all we have all met smart people who are miserable, right?

We've seen talented people that are broke. I have heard the stories of athletes, the rich and famous actors, or musicians who had made millions in their careers and end up with absolutely nothing. We've seen attractive people that can't hold a relationship. Some of you might say amen to that, "you may have even dated that person." Don't raise your hand if that's you.

So, here's what I think makes all the difference. It boils down to our decisions. To take it a step further I might add, that the quality of your decisions determines the quality of your life.

It works something like this you make your decisions, and your decisions end up making you.

The problem is that most of us, we just aren't good decision-makers. We want to eat right, but then we decide to eat more than we should and it's with the food we shouldn't. We want to be wise with our money, but we decide to buy things we can't afford to impress people we don't even like. We want to be wise with our words, but we decide to say things that we regret. We want to do

the right thing, but we make decisions and do the wrong thing instead.

I think Paul the Apostle could relate to that, listen to what he had to say on the subject. . .

Romans 7:15–25 (TPT) - ¹⁵I'm a mystery to myself, for I want to do what is right, but end up doing what my moral instincts condemn. ¹⁶And if my behavior is not in line with my desire, my conscience still confirms the excellence of the law. ¹⁷And now I realize that it is no longer my true self doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin in my humanity. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good lives within the flesh of my fallen humanity. The longings to do what is right are within me, but willpower is not enough to accomplish it. ¹⁹My lofty desires to do what is good are dashed when I do the things I want to avoid. ²⁰So if my behavior contradicts my desires to do good, I must conclude that it's not my true identity doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin *hindering me from being who I really am*. ²¹Through my experience of this principle, I discover that even when I want to do good, evil is ready to sabotage me. ²²Truly, deep within my true identity, I love to do what pleases God. ²³But I discern another power operating in my humanity, waging a war against the moral principles of my conscience and bringing me into captivity as a prisoner to the "law" of sin—this unwelcome intruder in my humanity. ²⁴What an agonizing situation I am in! So who has the power to rescue this miserable man from the unwelcome intruder of sin and death? ²⁵I give all my thanks to God, for his mighty power has finally provided a way out through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! So if left to myself, the flesh is aligned with the law of sin, but now my renewed mind is fixed on and submitted to God's righteous principles.

The list goes on and on. . .we want to love the people around us, but sometimes our decisions end up hurting the very people that we love the most. We want to be good-decision makers, but the problem is most of us aren't.

I will be the first to admit I've done stupid on more than a few occasions.

Maybe you've never done something you regret? Maybe your one of those that has made no dumb decisions.

Let me just start by saying this if you never have done those things, give it time. And if you have done stupid don't camp there. I can honestly say because of what Jesus has done I don't have to life in regrets camp.

I know I talked about this subject a while ago, but I want to spend the first few weeks of 2023 picking it back up because I am convinced that in order to fulfill our theme for this year. . .remember what it is? I mentioned it last week it's: you are destined to be in twenty-three.

And in order to fulfill that it is imperative we learn to make better decisions.

Not that God is going to curse us if we don't, send an angel to slap us into alignment, but here is the truth there is a Scriptural principle that says, you sow what you reap.

So, over the next few weeks I want to talk about the power of our decisions, and I want to start with answering the question, why is it that we struggle to make good decisions?

Why do we want to do the right thing, and we end up doing the wrong thing, today I'm going to set a foundation and over the next few weeks we look at some other key points on the subject.

Why do we struggle to make good decisions? I'm going to give three I'm sure there are many more, but time would not allow us to look at every one so let me just start with three.

First, we get overwhelmed with choices. How many decisions do you think you make in any given day? (wait for response)

Some studies show that we'll make upwards of around 35,000 decisions a day. 35,000 can you say Oh My. . .

From the moment you wake up, what do I eat? What do I wear? Do I scroll, tap, or swipe? Do I just scroll past or leave a comment? Which route do I take to work? And when I get there what do I say to people at work?

It's interesting that Cognitive scientists have termed the phrase decision fatigue.

Essentially what happens, as the volume of decisions increase, the quality of decisions decrease. Because we're making decisions day after day, moment after moment, all day long, our decision-making muscle gets tired.

That's why you may make difficult and wise decisions at the office, and then you come home and decide to binge eat at night. It's because you got tired of making good decisions. Or you make wise financial choices, and you're saving and you're paying off debt and you're doing the right thing, and then you make some stupid purchase out of nowhere, because of decision fatigue.

We try to make good decisions, but because of the volume, the quality starts to decrease.

The second problem is, if you're taking notes, is that we're afraid of making the wrong choices, and I think this is especially true for those of us who are followers of Jesus, because we don't want to miss God's will, and so at times we'll analyze something and say, "Well, I'm not sure that's the perfect school for our kids, the perfect job, or the perfect person to date,"

And since we aren't sure, we just don't make any decisions at all, but the truth is church, that indecision is actually a decision, and indecision is the enemy of progress.

And the third one and this is the one I want to talk about the most today is that we let emotions overrule logic. Truth is on some decisions, we spend way too much time analyzing.

Think about it, some of you might spend more time analyzing what series to binge watch than you actually do binge watching the whole series.

You look at everything and we'll overanalyze a lot of decisions that don't really matter, and then we just make impulse decisions on the things that do matter.

Martha did that, listen to the story. . .

Luke 10:38–42 (TPT) - ^{38–39} As Jesus and the disciples continued on their journey, they came to a village where a woman welcomed Jesus into her home. Her name was Martha and she had a sister named Mary. Mary sat down attentively before the Master, absorbing every revelation he shared. ⁴⁰ But Martha became exasperated by finishing the numerous household chores in preparation for her guests, so she interrupted Jesus and said, “Lord, don’t you think it’s unfair that my sister left me to do all the work by myself? You should tell her to get up and help me.”

⁴¹ The Lord answered her, “Martha, my beloved Martha. Why are you upset and troubled, pulled away by all these many distractions? Are they really that important? ⁴² Mary has discovered the one thing most important by choosing to sit at my feet. She is undistracted, and I won’t take this privilege from her.”

Now this text can also be used to speak into priorities, but I think it's fitting as well for decisions. Mary chooses to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn, Martha choose to prepare the meal for her guests. Jesus who talk talk to Mary she's not listening to me and I need help.

The truth is often it's the emotional decisions that end up hurting us or hurting others the most, that's why is it so important not to make permanent decisions based on temporary emotions.

Don't make decisions that will impact you for years to come based on the emotion that you feel in the moment.

My wife and I have insurance that we can borrow on. It can be paid back and you are paying yourself the interest. What's the harm in that, all it will do is lower the death benefit amount if you die before it's paid back.

So, we borrowed on it. Do you know why? I couldn't remember the reason, but Joy reminded me a while ago. We borrowed on it so that we could take the family on vacation.

Now hear me church I have no regrets about that, it was all about making memories even though I personally don't remember where that vacation was, but we didn't have any money without doing that. It's been years and we are still paying that insurance policy back. Again no regrets, just not a wise choice.

Why do our decisions matter so much?

The reason is because the quality of our decisions determines the quality of our lives. We make our decisions, and our decisions make us.

One of the best ways to live a forward-looking, God-glorifying life is to decide now what you will do later.

Proverbs 16:3 (NIV) - ³Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.

If you're dating somebody, commit your dating relationship to the Lord. If you're married, commit your marriage. If you're parenting, commit your children to the Lord. If you're making financial decisions, commit your financial decisions to the Lord. Whatever decision you make commit everything to the Lord, and scripture tells us that, "He will," What? "Establish your plans."

Jesus said it this way. . .

Matthew 6:33 (TPT) - ³³“So above all, constantly chase after the realm of God’s kingdom and the righteousness that proceeds from him. Then all these less important things will be given to you abundantly.

When we commit to the Lord and there's no better time to do it then at the beginning of the year, when we commit our entire year to the Lord and we seek the Lord for our decisions, he will help establish our plans.

We need to decide that with God's help, we're going to determine our course of action before the moment of decision occurs.

Whenever faced with whatever it is. Should I look? Should I buy it? Should I respond? Should I yell? Should I cut off that driver? Should I swipe my card? Whenever I'm faced with decide ahead of time with God's help by the truth of his Word, what we'll do in any given situation.

You don't decide to give to God when you have provision. You give to God now in thanks for His provision.

You don't decide when your 75 to start an IRA you do that when you get your first job that allows you to, so that you can have money to live off when your 75.

When you're always worried about something, and you know anything could go wrong and you could just lose your faith in God and just start worrying, we're going to decide a head of time that the moment I start to worry, instead of going to people, instead of going to the bar, I'm instead going to go immediately to God, and I have decided in advance to take that situation to God. I decided before it all transpired to take my burdens and I cast them on him.

Someone cuts you off in traffic. You need to determine in advance how you are going to respond. Because truth is if we allow our emotions in the moment tell us what we do or say it may not be as God honoring as they should.

And when you look at scripture, what's so much fun to see is that others left example after example of God's people deciding in the now what they will do in the later.

In Genesis 22. God told Abraham, "I want you to sacrifice your son Isaac."

And Abraham's looking on, thinking, "That's nuts. That makes no sense whatsoever. He's my promised child."

But Abraham had decided well before that, that "My God is always trustworthy and always faithful so whatever he asks me to do, I have determined, I have set my heart, on the fact that I will obey and honor him. For I know He will provide and deliver."

Ruth. You can read about it in Ruth chapter one. She made a commitment to Naomi and decided ahead of time that whatever happens in the future, "No matter where you go, I'm going. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God."

Daniel. He's a rock star on decide if now to deal with the later. He and his friends were taken hostage to a foreign land, and they

were being brainwashed, told you have to think the way we think, eat the food we eat, learn what we have learnt.

But that would have been dishonoring to God, so Daniel. . .

Daniel 1:8 (NIV) - ⁸But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

He had already decided well in advance "Not to defile himself with the royal food and wine." He didn't wait until he got in the dining room to make the decision. He had pre-determined

Why? Because he knew who and what he valued.

I want to ask you this. As you move into the new year with another chance to honor God, what do you value? What's the most important thing or things to you? When people talk about you or think about you, what do you want them to say? What do you want to be known by? What legacy do you hope to leave behind?

When people describe you, what do you want them to say about you? What do you want your reputation to be? What do you want, even despite your reputation, what do you want them to know deep down that matters to you more than anything else?

We have been given the perfect opportunity with a new calendar to set the record straight if we need to.

I want you to think about that. My prayer is that you will learn to commit everything to the Lord, so he will establish your plans based on the values He's put in your heart.

You might say, "I value integrity." I know God desires that you do. And I hope you do.

Proverbs 22:1 (NIV) - A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

You might say, "I value purity. And in a world that focuses more on the pleasure of sin for a season, it's not always easy to honor God with a life of purity."

And the list can go on and on, but why does this matter anyway?

Because when your values are clear, your decisions are easier. When you know what you value, you can decide ahead of time, whenever I face this situation in the future, I've already determined based on God's Word and the values he put in my heart, this is what I have decided I will do. I have drawn the proverbial line in the sand.

If we do that how will this play out?

Truth is I don't know, but one thing I can say with confidence is that your decisions determine direction, and direction determines destiny.

Our unwise decisions tend to intensify negatively, and our wise God-honoring decisions tend to compound in a positive and God-honoring way.

So, as you look at what you value, ask yourself, are your decisions moving in the right direction? I want to ask you a question that you really need to think about, and that is this: If your life is moving in the direction of your decisions, do you like the direction your decisions are taking you?

If you don't, then it's time to determine to do something different.

Draw the line in the sand that says, when I'm faced with this situation, because of who my God is and because of what I value, I'm not going to wait until I'm in that situation to decide based on my emotions or how I feel, instead, I'm going to predetermine, before I ever get there, that I will take this action.

Ephesians 2:10 (TPT) - ¹⁰ We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance *our destiny* and the good works we would do *to fulfill it!*

Oh, but wait it even gets better. . .

Acts 2:23 (TPT) - ²³ This Man's destiny was prearranged, for God knew that Jesus would be handed over to you to be crucified and that you would execute him on a cross by the hands of lawless men. Yet it was all part of his predetermined plan.

Jesus determined in advance to be about His Father's business.

Can be really real with you, I've noticed some qualities about me that aren't always God honoring. Maybe you've noticed some in your life as well. Let me share a couple of the ones I've noticed in me.

Here's what I know? I sometimes can be unintentional. Instead of being proactive and prayerful and intentional about my decisions, sometimes I'm kind of hands off, a little too laid back. I let life come at me rather than coming at life for the glory of God.

Someone tells me I'm they are sick, or struggling I say I'll pray for them, and I do, just not necessarily in that moment. I need to be a bit more intentional but being obedient to Papa now not a few days from now.

Another issue I have is I'm shortsighted. I'll at times do what feels good in the moment and not think about the long-term consequences.

There are others of you that whenever things get tough, tend to quit. Tend to give up. Tend to just walk away and sometimes move on, sometimes not.

So, over the next few weeks, I want to try motivating you, to be a part of this series. And in it we are going to make some pre-determined resolutions about who we are.

Because I know that when you know who you are, and whose you are, you'll know what to do.

When your values are clear, your decisions are easier, so because we know where we're vulnerable, we're going to determine in advance several things. Next week we will look at how when the devil attacks, we're not going to be unprepared. We're going to be on our guard. We're going to watch and pray so that we are ready.

There are others we are going to look at like when it's easy to be inconsistent, on one day, off another day, with the help of God, we're going to be consistent.

In a world where people often stray from God and lose their passion, and the devil tempts them to take God for granted, not be students of his Word, not be glorifying him, we're going to talk about being devoted to God.

There's more, but I don't want to get too far ahead of myself. . .I just want to encourage you determine ahead of time that you want to be a part of this.

And as we start off this year we are deciding ahead of time, we are not what the world says we are. We're not who the devil says we are. We're not what we did in the past. We are not what anybody else thinks about us.

We are who God says we are. and when we face a certain situation, we have determined in advance, that this is who we are, and this is what we will do.

And that will help you one day, when you're tired and you're overwhelmed, angry, or you feel emotional, discouraged, or depressed, and you don't know what to do next.

In that moment, you'll recognize you are more vulnerable than you thought you were. but stronger than you thought you were because of who you are and what He's done.

And the good news is your decision won't be based on the emotion in the moment, but on the values God has placed on your heart, because when your values are clear, your decisions are easier.

J.K Rowling's the author of the Harry Potter books and listen I'm not here to discuss your views on those books, but she received an award in 2019, I think that was the year, anyway she was given the Ripple of Hope honor by the Robert F Kennedy Human Rights organization.

She gave it back because she sparked controversy when she posted tweets which took issue with the phrase "people who menstruate".

Rowling objected to the avoidance of the use of the word "women".

One of the people with that organization said in part. . .

"From her own words, I take Rowling's position to be that the sex one is assigned at birth is the primary and determinative factor of one's gender, regardless of one's gender identity - a position that I categorically reject."

You see when your values are clear, your decisions are easier.

Here's what Scripture has to say on that topic. . .

Psalm 139:14 (NIV) - ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

I'm trying to close out this message today just having a hard time getting to that place. I'm circling the run way. Give me just a few more minutes ok?

Let me share some really good news, since most of us are not good decision-makers, I want to tell you about Jesus.

Here's the good news we are not saved by the quality of our decisions, but we are saved by the grace of God, and Jesus determined in a garden called Gethsemane that no matter what comes his way and no matter what price he pays and no matter how hard it is, and no matter the pain he endures, he decided in advance, "Not my will, but your will be done," and he gave his life so we could have the abundant life of God on earth.

And so, because of that because God loved us that much, we need to determine in advance that we are going to commit everything to Him and he will establish our plans, so ahead of time, we already know, we will honor God in the moment..

We need to determine the course of action before the moment of the decision so that we can honor God in all that we do in all that we say.

In this series I'm inviting you to press into the goodness of God, let his Word go deep into your heart and burn the values of the kingdom of God inside of you, so you will know who you are and whose you are.

God is doing a new thing. Forget the former things. Don't dwell on the past. God is doing a new thing.

Let's pray. . .

Papa stir up the gift within us. Give us the wisdom, revelation, and determination. Just like Jesus decided in advance to commit everything to you. Let us do the same. And Father, I pray that by the power of your Word, your Word would do in us that we don't have the power to do in ourselves, so we can serve you and honor you in all we do. May the decisions that we make be based on the truth of your Word, and not the emotions we have in a moment. And God I thank you that your love got us isn't based on the quality of our decisions, because we've all decided to do things that weren't pleasing to you in the moment, but our standing with You is based on the Your goodness and grace. Amen

Let me close with this church. He loves you so much that he sent Jesus, who was perfect in every way, who became our sacrificial lamb, who died for the forgiveness of our sins. Who God raised from the dead, and our response is to simply decide. Decide to trust in Him, decide to honor Him, decide to love Him, decide to obey Him, decide to worship Him.

Listen church, we're forgiven not because we're perfect, but because he was perfect.