



## Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

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Fort Worth, TX 76123

# Moses, Making a Choice

## Lesson #2

Acts 7:22-25

## Lesson #25

As we studied in our first lesson on Moses, he was born a Hebrew. But due to the Pharaoh of Egypt decree to kill all of the newborn males of the Hebrews, Moses' family was forced to make the painful decision to give him up by floating him down the river, into the arms of Pharaoh's daughter.

Moses grew up in the palace of the Pharaoh of Egypt, one of, if not the, most powerful man in the world. He was afforded the best education in the entire world. He lived in complete luxury. He was said to have been an incredibly handsome man that common people would wait hours on the shore of the great Nile River just in hopes of catching a glimpse of him on his luxury boat. Moses had it all, almost.

Moses had all that THIS world had to offer. Riches, wealth, worldly wisdom, good looks, physical power and the power of politics, just to name a few. But something was missing. Upon visiting his people, the Hebrews, his life was forever changed.

Moses stood up for a fellow Hebrew, killing the man who was attacking him. Though he thought his act unseen, it was not. This led to Moses leaving Egypt and going to stay with his people. He made a decision to forgo his Egyptian upbringing and all of the perks that came with it and devoted his life to serving his God.

### The “God” of Open Options?

First Kings 18:21 describes a crucial moment of decision. It’s the final showdown between the God of Israel and a false god called Baal. Elijah calls God’s people to choose once and for all between the living God who delivered them, and this false god who has captured their affections: “‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’ But the people said nothing.”

They seem unable, or unwilling, to make a choice. They want to hedge their bets, sit on the fence, and keep their options open.

How different are we in the 21st century? Would you prefer to make an ironclad, no-turning-back choice, or one you could back out of if need be? Do you ever find that you’re afraid to commit? Do you reply to party invitations with a “maybe” rather than a “yes” or “no”? Do you like to keep your smartphone switched on at all times, even in meetings, so that you are never fully present at any given moment? Will you focus on the person you’re talking to after a church service, or will you look over her shoulder for a better conversation partner?

If so, you may be worshiping the god of open options.

People wait years before declaring a college major, they only go to stores with a guaranteed return policy, and it's not unusual for a person to date someone for years before getting married — if they ever do get married. We reserve the right to keep our options open in every department of our lives, from sex to spirituality.

### *The Demand for Choice*

In his book *The Paradox of Choice*, psychologist Barry Schwartz explains why we have trouble committing, why we love to keep our options open. He says that as a culture we demand choice. We demand options. We imagine that more options mean more freedom. And most people think that limitless freedom must be a good option.

The irony, Schwartz writes, is that this apparently limitless choice doesn't actually make us happy. The number of choices available to us becomes overwhelming, and actually makes it difficult for us to ever have the joy of fully committing to anything or anyone. Even if we do commit, our culture makes us feel dissatisfied with the choice we've made.

During a recent Starbucks visit, I stood behind a customer who ordered a decaf grande sugar-free vanilla nonfat latte with extra foam and the milk heated to 140 degrees. As I stood in line, I actually started to think; maybe I want 140-degree coffee too. Maybe, I thought to myself, my choice of milk temperature up to this point has been catastrophically naive. Suddenly, his choices made me unhappier about my own. I began to covet. I wasn't sure what I wanted anymore. I became anxious and indecisive. I wasn't sure I was ready to commit —

either to my kind of coffee or to his. Was this really freedom of choice, or slavery to it?

What if we take the same multiplicity of trivial options we have at Starbucks, and apply them to bigger questions: where we should work, where we should study, where we should live, whom we should marry, or whom we should worship? It seems that the more options we have, the more afraid we are of choosing. We become enslaved to being noncommittal. We don't want to make a mistake or cut down our options. In fact, we may become so fearful of making a choice, we simply refuse to choose.

As we do that, we are worshiping an idol. A false god. One of the Baals of our culture, in fact. His name is "open options."

### *Not Choosing Is a Choice*

Over the years, the Israelites had seen themselves delivered from slavery — repeatedly, spectacularly, and miraculously — by the living God. The Egyptian gods were powerless against him, as were the gods of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Yet here they are in 1 Kings 18, their faces licking the dust before Baal, worshiping another soon-to-be-defeated god.

It should disgust us. But as God's people today, how different are we? We have been delivered from slavery to sin by Christ's death and resurrection, spectacularly and miraculously.

Yet here we are, many of us, worshiping the very gods that Christ has triumphed over, when we know they are defeated gods, and will only drag us to our deaths if we cling to them.

We worship the god of open options. And he is killing us. He kills our relationships, because he tells us it's better not to become too involved. He kills our service to others because he tells us it might be better to keep our weekends to ourselves. He kills our giving because he tells us these are uncertain financial times and you never know when you might need that money. He kills our joy in Christ because he tells us it's better not to be thought of as too spiritual.

What is most frightening of all about the god of open options is that you may not even know that you are worshiping him. Why, because he pretends not to be a god at all.

In fact, he promises you freedom from all gods, all responsibilities. "Keep your options open," he says. "Worship me, and you don't have to serve anything or anyone. No commitment necessary. Total freedom."

Similarly, the Israelites thought that by saying nothing (1 Kings 18:21) they were not committing idolatry. But when they chose not to decide, they made a choice. By refusing to act, they were actually turning away from the living God who rescued them, and committing an obscene act of spiritual adultery by worshiping the god of open options. Some modern translations describe God's people as "wavering" between two different opinions, but the Hebrew is closer to our word "limping." Their indecision was crippling them.

The living God — the loving, triune God — did not create us to keep our options open. He didn't create us to live in fear of making a choice. He didn't create us to be like Robert De Niro's character in the 1995 movie Heat, a man who vows never to get involved in anything he can't walk away from in 30 seconds. God created us to commit. But to him, and to others. He created us to choose.

### *When Waiting Isn't Wise*

It's right to be careful in our decision-making, of course: to pray, to seek counsel from Scripture and from wise Christians. The bigger the decision, the more careful we should be. But there comes a point when pausing becomes procrastination, when waiting is no longer wise. There comes a point when not to choose becomes idolatry. It becomes a lack of trust in the God who ordains the decisions we will make, gathers up the frayed ends, and works all things for our good and his glory.

Be wise, but then rest in God's total sovereignty and goodness, and choose. Commit. Make a decision. Be wholehearted and single-minded.

James 1:6–8 puts it like this: "Believe and do not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. . . . Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do."

Trust that God is good and sovereign, and redeems every choice we make. If even the choices of those who murdered his own Son were ordained for our own infinite good (Acts 4:27–28), then how can we doubt that he intends good to come from our choices, however ill-advised they may be?

Another reason for rejecting the god of open options is because the living God himself is a God who chooses. And he made us in his image.

### *Learning to Choose*

Ephesians 1:4 says, "[H]e chose us in him before the creation of the world." First Corinthians 1:27 says, "God chose the foolish things of

the world to shame the wise.” Second Thessalonians 2:13 says, “God chose you . . . to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (emphases added).

If the living God were as fond of keeping his options open as we are, we would have nothing to look forward to except eternal torment.

So let me ask you, in what area of your life are you still flirting with the god of open options? Where are you refusing to choose? Maybe you’re refusing to commit to a particular relationship — perhaps even your marriage? Maybe you’re not truly committed at work — you have Facebook open in one of your browser tabs, half hoping to be interrupted. Maybe your restless eyes are on constant alert for something or someone better.

Maybe you’re keeping your options open with God himself, not allowing yourself to become too committed. Elijah is speaking to you in 1 Kings, and he is saying, “Make a choice.” You have all the information about God you need. Enough of this noncommittal, risk-averse, weak-willed, God-forgetting immaturity. Or, as it probably says in some of the more modern translations, “Grow up.”

I write this with tears. As I look back over the past 20 years of my Christian life, I have repeatedly worshiped and served the god of open options, and I’ve seen many do the same. How many, for example, have been afraid to commit to marriage because the god of open options hates the marriage service? He knows that during it, we must promise to “forsake all others,” and that means forsaking all other options.

The god of open options is a cruel and vindictive god. He will break your heart. He will not let anyone get too close. But at the same time, because he is so spiteful, he will not let anyone get too far away because that would mean they are no longer an option. On and on it

continues, exhausting and frustrating and confusing and endless, pulling towards and then pushing away, like the tide on a beach, never finally committing one way or the other. We have been like the starving man sitting in front of an all-you-can-eat buffet, dying simply because he would not choose between the chicken and the shrimp.

The god of open options is also a liar. He promises you that by keeping your options open, you can have everything and everyone. But in the end, you get nothing and no one.

### **You Must Choose**

Jesus said, “You cannot serve two masters.” At any given moment, you must choose whom you will follow. And if you choose the god of open options, you cannot at that moment choose the triune God, the one who deliberately closed off his options in order to save your life. Nothing narrows your options more than allowing your hands and feet to be nailed to a wooden cross.

“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before your life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life” (Deuteronomy 30:19–20).

Choose the God of infinite possibility who chose to limit himself to a particular time, a particular place, and a particular people. Choose the God who closed off all other alternatives so that he could pursue for himself one bride. Choose the God who chose not to come down from the cross until she was won.

**Choose the narrow way.**

## Application/Activity

Look at your life. What worldly distractions take up your time? Television, computer, social media, sports. What do you want to accomplish for God? Do you have the time? Are you willing to figure out what God wants you to be doing and are you willing to make the choice and give up what this world tells us all is important? This week's activity is to try and document how we spend our time. How much time to you watch television? How much time do you browse the internet? How much time do you spend on social media? How much time to you spending praying? How much time do you spend reading your Bible? How much time do you spend with your family?