

Making Better Decisions
January 26, 2014

A farmer hired a man to work for him. He told him his first task would be to paint the barn and said it should take him about three days to complete. But to the farmer's amazement, the hired man was finished in one day. The next day the farmer had the man cutting fire wood and said it would take about 4 days. The hired man finished in two days. The third day, the task was to sort out a large pile of potatoes. He was to arrange them into three piles: seed potatoes, food for the hogs, and potatoes that were good enough to sell. The farmer said it was a small job and shouldn't take more than a day. At the end of the day the farmer came back and found the hired man had barely started. "What's the matter here?" the farmer asked. The hired man replied, "I can work hard, but I can't make decisions."

This morning, I want to give you some help to make better decisions this next year. I have five questions for you. You could start by asking these questions of the big decisions you made last year. This may reveal to you why they turned out badly. I hope you will also start asking these questions of the decisions that face you this coming year. Doing so will help you reach your goals.

The first question is this: **1) Is it legal?**

Is what you are proposing to do legal? This one should go without saying. But I'm going to say it anyway so it is clear. These days, more and more of what shouldn't need to be said, does need to be said. The reason is that people don't know it. They have not been taught even the basics of living a successful life. The keys to living a successful life and making good decisions are not:

"Grab all the gusto you can."

"It's okay if it doesn't anyone." or

"If it feels good, do it."

You could say that about many things that are illegal. People did them because they were fun. But just because something is fun doesn't mean you should do it.

God calls us to a higher standard than the rest of people who don't serve Him. He expects us to obey every authority that is over us.

1 Peter 2:13-16 (NIV) Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

The laws of the land are made by those God has allowed to have authority over us. God calls us to respect and obey that authority. So a first question to ask yourself about decisions that you face this year is, is it legal.

A second question to ask is... **2) Is it good for me?**

1 Corinthians 6:12a (NIV) Everything is permissible for me– but not everything is beneficial.

There are many choices you might make that are perfectly legal. There is no human law against them. But they are not good for you. In fact, they harm you in some way.

To make better decisions, ask yourself the question, is this choice good for me? If the answer is no, then make a better choice, one that IS good for you.

Ask the question, "Is this choice good for me? **Is it good for me physically?**

Ask this of smoking. As long as you are of age, it is legal to smoke cigarettes. But it is not good for you. We've known for years that it wasn't good for you. This week new information came out showing that it is much worse than we knew. Other things are not good for your health either. So make a better choice.

What you might choose might not harm you physically, but ask, **Is it good for me spiritually?** Is this going to move me closer to God or further away. Is this an expression of my faith in Jesus or my lack of faith? Is this going to encourage me to pray more... or less? Will this encourage me to serve self or serve others?

Just because something is legal doesn't mean it is beneficial.

This third question is this: **3) Can it control me?**

Just because something is legal doesn't mean it is beneficial. Just because something is beneficial now, doesn't mean it will be beneficial later. The next level or next step may get you too involved with it. The next step may not be beneficial. There may be a long term downside to this choice.

1 Corinthians 6:12b (NIV) “Everything is permissible for me– but I will not be mastered by anything.”

In-other-words... **Is it habit forming, even addictive?**

I grew up watching TV. After school we went out to play, unless it was too hot, or too cold. Then, most of the time, we watched TV. When it was too dark out to play, we watched TV. Our default leisure time activity was TV, not toys, not reading, not games, not puzzles. We did all those, but mostly what we did was watch TV.

As I got older, TV became a problem. In my teen years I had a paper route and bought my own TV. It was just a black and white 13 inch. And there was no cable. But it sat at the foot of my bed and tempted me to watch. So instead of doing much homework, I watched TV. When I was supposed to be asleep, I watched TV. Instead of doing things that would improve my mind, and my ability to reason, I watched TV.

In college, I had not learned to study and watched TV. I was very motivated in seminary, but I know that I would have had a much harder time in seminary if I had had a TV in my dorm room. TV was too strong a temptation to me then.

An old **Spanish proverb says that, "Habits are first cobwebs, then cables."**

Los Angeles Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda describes his battle with bad habits: "I took a pack of cigarettes from my pocket, stared at it and said, "Who's stronger, you or me?" The answer was me. I stopped smoking. Then I took a vodka martini and said to it, "Who's stronger, you or me?" Again the answer was me. I quit drinking. Then I went on a diet. I looked at a big plate of linguine with clam sauce and said, "Who's stronger, you or me?" And a little clam looked up at me and answered, "I am." I can't beat linguine.

(Ron Fimrite in Sports Illustrated)

It would be wise of you to admit now, the kinds of things that you KNOW are habit forming for you, that are addictive for you. Maybe the others in your family would not have the same problem. Maybe your friends would not have any trouble controlling this. But for you, this choice is the wrong choice because it would become a habit, maybe even an addiction.

Where does it next lead to? Is there an acceptable next step? Or is the next step a place that you don't want to be.

Will enjoying a drink lead to needing a drink? Will beer or wine lead to hard liquor? Marijuana seems on its way to becoming legal nationwide. And while it may not lead everyone to use of other drugs, it has led some. Will marijuana use lead you to cocaine? If you don't know the answer to that, it would be a wiser choice to leave it be.

Will flirting lead to adultery? If the conditions of your life are right, or wrong, it could!

Will exaggeration lead to lying? Will borrowing lead to stealing? Will pornography lead to acting out your fantasies? All of those could be true of you.

The fourth question is... **4) Does it encourage someone else to do something he/she thinks is wrong?**

In Paul's letter to very troubled church in the city of Corinth, he warns them about this.

1 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

The context of this statement concerns eating meat that has been offered to an idol in a heathen temple. The mature Christian knows that the idol does not represent a god of any kind. Eating such meat is not going to harm your relationship with Jesus. But setting such an example publicly will become a model of behavior for other Christians who are not as assured in this truth as you are. They will be tempted to eat the meat also, and will then feel guilty of sin for doing so. Your freedom to eat such meat has caused them to sin. For if you believe something to be a sin, for you it IS a sin.

None of the meat offered at our grocery stores has been offered to non-Christian deities, so this is not an issue for us. But the principle applies to other issues that we face.

A growing trend is Christians being more public about their freedom in Christ. One sign of this trend is those Christian authors and leaders who admit publicly to using alcohol as a beverage. While there is no Biblical prohibition of alcohol beverage use, there are cautions of over indulging and the effects it can have. Our church recognizes these cautions in our documents.

I believe that Christians have freedom in regard to use of these beverages, but given how widespread is problem drinking, Christians should either not use them, or use them primarily in the privacy of their own home. They should not be advertising their use of them. This is especially true of Christian leaders, teachers, mentors, etc., who have a greater influence on immature believers. You may lead them into sin by your example. Instead, let us set them an example of self-control, even of self-denial, and do so for their benefit and for Christ.

From his book Daily Gems comes this story by D.L. Moody. "A blind man in a great city was found sitting at a street corner with a lantern beside him. Someone went up to him and asked him why he had the lantern, since he was blind and the light of it was the same to him as the darkness. The blind man simply replied, 'So that no one may stumble over me.'"

Whatever choice you are about to make, it may not harm you spiritually, but could it, by your example, harm other Christians? We have a responsibility to each other to model the best choices, not the worst.

And then the last question, **5) Does it glorify God?**

Paul encourages the Christians in Corinth to this too.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV) So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

A related question to ask yourself is this: **Can I really do this to the glory of God?**

Some things you just can't do to the glory of God. Can you waste time to the glory of God? Can you over eat to the glory of God? Can you procrastinate to the glory of God? Can you think mean thoughts to the glory of God? Can you worry to the glory of God? Can you develop bad habits to the glory of God? If the answer is no, then make a choice of something you CAN do to the glory of God.

So there you have five questions to ask in order to make better choices. Do this and your wisdom for making good choices will grow.

Some years ago a young man was talking with an older man. The older man had succeeded in business. The young man asked the older what the secret to success was. The older man replied, "Making good decisions." The younger man thought that over a few moments and then asked, "And what is the secret to making good decisions?" The older man answered, "Making bad decisions."

I hope that this new year will find you making better decisions based on the wisdom of God's word. Ask these questions of the bad decisions you made last year. Likely you will see how each bad decision would have received a no answer to one of these questions.

All of this requires self-control, of course. But remember that self-control is a benefit of living in obedience to the Holy Spirit. For more on this, see last week's sermon (January 19, 2014).

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Another question that it is wise to ask is one that too many people are not asking. It is this: Do I have a right relationship with God?

If you are not sure you do, if you are only guessing, then you and I need to talk. God wants you to know how to have a right relationship with Him. He wants you to have such a relationship with Him and wants you to know you do.

You can have a right relationship to God only through Jesus, the Savior God has sent us. Today, pray to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord and you will have a right relationship to Jesus.