

“Choices”

Psalm 1, Mark 9:33-37, James 3:13-4:2A

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Charles Swindoll said, “The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than success, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company ... a church ... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude...I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you, we are in charge of our attitudes.”

The first psalm explains that every moment of our life we have a choice. We can choose love and joy making us like a fruitful tree or we can choose fear, hate, and negativity and be like chaff.

Psalm 1 NRSV “Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on God’s law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

All of us choose to be wicked at times. We are wicked when we choose to think negative thoughts, which sometimes leads to wrong doing. We are wicked whenever we choose to give up on love instead tearing down, destroying, being toxic, miserable, and grumpy. We are wicked when we choose to be a mocker, scoffer, unpleasant, belittling, teasing, judging, and treating with contempt. We are wicked when we choose to follow wicked advice, believing and spreading news, information and stories without first verifying the facts and listening to opposing views, therefore spreading lies. We are wicked when we choose to join in a complaining conversation or demeaning conversation toward any person, group, or organization. Our wicked choices are like chaff. Chaff is the other husk of a seed that comes lose at harvest time. The wind easily blows chaff around. Chaff has no nutritional value. Chaff sticks to your body, irritating your skin, causing itching, and sometimes a rash. The good news is our wicked choices will perish completely.

All of us choose to be blessed at times. The meanings to the word “bless” are numerous and wide. Some aspects of blessed are choosing to be joyful, open, and accepting. Choosing to grow, transform, and increase one’s capacity to love and experience awe, wonder, and gratitude. Choosing to ever expand one’s perceptions and knowledge of God. Blessed is choosing to build, develop, and journey forth into the glory of God’s kingdom. A person is blessed when they choose to meditate on God’s law day and night. God’s law can be summed up in one word, “love”. Scripture reveals how to love in all situations. We are blessed when we choose to think about love, give and receive love and dream about a life and cosmos fully, completely permeated with love continually. When we choose love, we are like a tree planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in its seasons and their leaves do not wither. Choosing love enables us to become fully alive. Love endures forever.

Listen for our choices as explained by the apostle James. **James 3:13-4:2a NRSV “Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts.”**

Jesus explains that we commit murder whenever we feel hate in our heart. You dislike something. You get to choose whether you hate it or accept it as something other people love. You adamantly disagree with someone. You get to choose whether you hate them or love them. You get to choose whether you call them names and demonize them or seek to understand them and dialogue with them. You get to choose division or peace. James encourages us to choose wisely. James says we get to choose gentleness or forcefulness, bitterness or encouragement, selfishness or serving, false boasting or humble truth. We get to choose envy or goodwill, mercy or cruelty, grace or judgement, partiality or inclusivity. We get to choose peaceful, loving relationships or hostile, fearful division.

The gospel of Mark proclaims, **Mark 9:33-37** “Then Jesus and the disciples came to Capernaum; and when Jesus was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. Jesus sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then Jesus took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

We get to choose selfish, arrogant pride or compassionate, humble service. What about how children choose is unique?

A dignified old man would regularly get down on his hands and knees and pretend he was a horse. The children would squeal with joy on the old man’s back. Here there obviously was no generation gap; he was one with the child. I once asked him how it was that he could so relate to the child, and he replied: “I who am an old man am about to return to the Great Mysterious and a young child is a being who has just come from the Great Mysterious; so it is that we are very close together.” Do children excel at choosing love, joy, trust, and peace? Do children excel at play, wonder, and delight? Are children free of past baggage and free of worry about the future enabling them to fully live in the present?

A Taizé commentary puts it this way: “What the Bible calls God’s “law” is not essentially a question of rules and regulations; rather, it is God’s whole aim for human life, a project of love, joy, trust and peace. Psalm 1 does not call “blessed” someone who blindly follows all the rules, as if God were interested in a kind of surface conformity. What is important is not rules, but to realize that God’s intention for us is beautiful, joyful, and life-giving. God’s “law” is the expression of God’s will for us, grasped through the teaching of the Scriptures and through the whole story of God’s relationship to humanity. And God’s will for us is nothing other than God’s love.” Do children excel at choosing love?

D. E. Harding writes, “Indeed the universe does not look like the product of a pessimist or a work-manager, and still less like the work of a priest; but much more like that of an artist who is well aware of the value of nonsense, of play, and of a superbly bountiful imagination.” Do children choose fun?

When you choose to be more loving, forgiving, and joyful, obstacles will arise. Keep choosing love, forgiveness, and joy. When you choose to be more loving of yourself by resting, healthy eating, or exercise, obstacles will arise. Keep choosing the positive. Refrain from shaming yourself, instead choose to view yourself the way you want to be. Difficult, crummy things will happen at work. Choose to make a positive, loving difference. Our health will fail. Choose to make the best of the situation. The church will disappoint. Choose to keep worshiping, serving, and loving to make the church more loving, so together we can make the world more loving. Instead of giving up on the church, politics, any organization, group, or person choose to believe in the power of love to make whole, wonderful and glorious all. Instead of being cynical choose to full heatedly commit yourself to goodness. You are in total control of how you choose to react to every situation. You are in total control to choose your attitude.

Psalm 1 NRSV Altered Order “The wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on God’s law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. Amen

