

“Are You Going to Make a Good Choice?”

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

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“Are you going to make a good choice?” This is a question I heard my daughter ask one of her six-year-old twins. It seems Kate was on the verge of getting into trouble, and Amy was trying to prevent it. She clearly laid out Kate’s options, and then Amy asked her this all-important question. “Kate, are you going to make a good choice? I want you to make a good decision, but I can’t make it for you. You must decide.”

On this occasion, Kate chose the high road and avoided having to sit in the dreaded “time-out” chair. This meant she could continue playing with her toys even though she was probably plotting the next way to aggravate Jack.

This morning, let’s talk about making good choices, which I think is at the heart of our text. I can almost hear Moses asking the Israelites if they were going to make a good choice after he so clearly laid out their options. Like a loving and responsible parent, I am confident he did everything he could to persuade them to make the best choice.

Moses voiced these words near the end of his life. The Israelites were preparing to enter the land promised by God to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, Moses would not accompany them on this final leg of their pilgrimage from Egypt. Joshua, his successor, would be the one to lead them over the river Jordan.

Before Moses died, though, he left these parting words. Actually, Deuteronomy contains three farewell discourses, and this is the last one. Many consider these carefully chosen words to be the most moving and brilliant speech in the Old Testament.

“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you 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, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

You know what impresses me the most about this passage? It is the way Moses dealt with the Israelites. He did not threaten them or try to manipulate them with guilt. Neither did he make the decision for them by telling them what they were going to do.

He respected their independence even as he described their options and their consequences. He was candid, clear, concise and caring.

At the same time, he made his wishes known. He wanted them to trust God with all their hearts and to be faithful to Him all their days, as he had done.

Who needs you to be this honest with them? What’s going on in their life? What can you do to help them make wise decisions?

How many nights have you laid awake wrestling with those questions? I suppose as long as we have children, and they have children, or we have friends whose welfare is important to us, we’ll always struggle with what to say or do to help them make good choices.

We also know our best efforts don't always lead to good results. In spite of our attempts to help those we love make wise decisions, they don't always do it.

Everyone who heard Moses' final address did not remain faithful to God. Reading the words and warnings of the prophets who followed Moses makes you wonder if any of them did.

This did not keep Moses from trying to persuade the Israelites to make good choices, though, and it should not discourage us. Love is willing to do the difficult. It is patient, tenacious, resilient and determined. Love doesn't give up. Instead it gets up and tries another approach. This is what Moses did for the Israelites until his dying day!

Having said this, I believe this text suggests things we can do to help those we love to make wise decisions. Let me share them with you.

Teach those under your care what God expects of them. Good choices begin with character development. Help them to understand God's way of living is best for them and everyone around them, as Moses did one final time before he died.

Be specific. Take advantage of every opportunity teach them to be honest, trustworthy, responsible, reliable, dependable, loyal and faithful. Impress upon them the value of being kind, fair, respectful, compassionate, humble, generous and forgiving.

Encourage them to resist the temptation to be selfish, greedy, mean, ugly, self-centered, petty, dishonest, unfaithful, insensitive, uncaring, vindictive or violent. Challenge them to be good friends and neighbors by building bridges of goodwill and understanding to everyone, not walls of suspicion and hatred.

Yes, good decisions begin with character development. Moses knew this. This is why he told them twice in this passage to love God, seek His will for their lives and walk in His ways. Doing so would bring the best out in them and build healthy communities around them as they crossed over the Jordan and settled in a new homeland.

When our children were growing up there were times they wanted to respond to a person who hurt them in unhealthy ways. Jackie and I advised against it. “Why?” they would ask. “Because you need to respond based upon who you are, not who they are,” we replied. “Evidently, their character will allow them to hurt other people; yours shouldn’t,” we told them.

Be a good role model, as Moses tried to be. If you don’t want your children to do something, don’t do it. If you want them to do something, show them what it is. Don’t send confusing signals by saying one thing and doing another.

Be transparent. Tell them about the times you did not make wise decisions and what the consequences were. Share with them what you learned from that experience, and how it changed you.

Don’t rescue your family members and friends when they make bad decisions. When you take away the consequences, you reward bad behavior. Nothing in their lives will change as long as you absorb their pain. It may not change anyway, but the potential for change drops dramatically when we rescue people who make bad choices.

At the same time, forgive others when they make mistakes and help them recover. Don’t abandon them when they need you the most. Walk alongside them as they deal with the consequences, offering words of hope and encouragement.

Bring people into their lives that will have a positive impact upon them. There is an old adage which states, “Show me your friends, and I will show you your future.” There is a lot of truth in these wise words.

You cannot pick another person’s friends, and neither should you, but you can surround him or her with good teachers, mentors and role models. Do it every chance you get.

This is especially true for your children. Make sure they are involved in our children and youth ministries at church, where they will interact with peers and leaders who will call forth the best from them.

Encourage your family members and friends often. Tell them you know it is not always easy to make wise decisions, and at times there is a price to pay for doing what is right. Let them know, however, you admire their good judgment and courage.

Pray without ceasing for them. Ask God to make His will clear to them and grant them wisdom, strength, courage, hope and faith. Ask God to open doors of opportunities for them and to lead them through those doors.

Who did these things for you? Who was as candid, clear and concise with you as Moses was with the Israelites? Who brought the best out in you, or helped you overcome the consequences of bad decisions?

Where would you be now had they not loved you this much? Is it your turn to pass it forward?

Who is trying to help you make wise decisions now? Who is talking to you about your decisions, and where you are heading?

Who is losing sleep over the choices you are making? Do you need to put your defenses down and your selfishness aside? Do you need to be a better listener and give those who love you another chance to help you see what you are overlooking?

“Choose life so you and your descendents may live,” Moses told the Israelites. **What does “choose life so you and your descendents may live” mean to you today?** What do you need to do this morning which would make life better for you and everyone around you? Will you ask God to help you take that first step?