

## Decisions, Decisions

Joshua 24:14-15 & Ephesians 1:3-10

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It's back to school season, so we're going to start today's sermon with a little ten question quiz. It's true or false. So, if your answer is true, raise your right hand and say true. I'll ask for the true's first. If your answer is false, raise your left hand and say false. You'll go second. And for those of you who are indecisive, well, good luck!

First question...

1. I often make impulsive purchases. True? False?
2. I rely heavily on my feelings and intuition when making decisions. True? False?
3. I find it difficult to do more than one thing at a time. True? False?
4. I often need to organize my thoughts on paper before making a decision. True? False?
5. I only see movies or read books that have received good reviews. True? False?
6. I often say things without thinking about them first. True? False?
7. I usually talk to others before making a decision. True? False?
8. I usually try something first before deciding whether I like or dislike it. True? False?
9. I sometimes talk aloud to myself. True? False?
10. I use a calendar to plan my week and try to adhere to it. True? False?

Depending on your answers, you fall into one of four decision-making categories.

You are either spontaneous/internal, spontaneous/external, systematic/internal or systematic/external in your decision making style. If you're spontaneous, you make choices quickly, based on what feels right. If you're systematic, you like to gather information before making decisions and seldom act impulsively.

These two tendencies pair up whether we rely on internal or external factors when making decisions. Internal decision makers analyze problems privately, and need time to organize their thoughts. External decision makers like to argue all sides of an issue and need to talk to others before making a decision.

Well done, class! You get an A! If you want to take the official online test, and find out for sure, you can visit Kent State University website.

No matter how you make decisions, the truth is we all make a lot of them, day in and day out! Research shows that an average adult makes 35,000 decisions in a day—[7 35000] including things like what to wear, whether to take a shower, whether to pass the car in front of you, how to respond to your child's request for a snack, what to make for dinner, whether to watch this show or that show. Even small children make about 3000 decisions a day.

Of course, decisions vary in their significance...Some are inconsequential and really don't make much difference. Some are more momentous, like deciding on where to go to college or if it's time to look for a new job. Some decisions seem small, but can have a big impact, like packing a water bottle for a desert hike. And some little, daily choices add up over time, like whether to go on a walk or sit on the couch, whether to eat carrot sticks or crack open the chips.

Given the number of choices we make in a day--big, little and in between, it's not surprising that most of us suffer from what psychologists call decision fatigue. As the day goes on, our brains grow tired of making choices. This is why we can become paralyzed at the grocery store, staring at the cereal, trying to choose between cheerios or golden grahams. We let insignificant choices consume our time and drain our energy. The more choices we make throughout the day, the harder each one becomes.

Eventually our brains look for shortcuts in either of two very different ways. One shortcut is to become reckless to act impulsively instead of expending the energy to first think through the consequences. (Sure, I'll tweet that photo! What could go wrong?) The other shortcut is the ultimate energy saver: just do nothing. Instead of agonizing over decisions, avoid any choice. While this sometimes backfires, delaying an important decision until you're well rested and refreshed can be wise.

The people of Israel have made a lot of decisions along their long, circuitous route through the wilderness. I'm not sure if they have decision fatigue, but they've been wandering around the desert with Moses for forty years. They decided to leave Egypt. They crossed the Red Sea. They collected and ate the manna and quail. They got restless while Moses was away and created a golden calf to worship. For better or worse, they made many choices along the way.

Now, they stand at the edge of the Promised Land, and Joshua asks them to make one more big decision. Will you serve the Lord now that we've made it to the land of milk and honey? Will you recommit your hearts to God, obey his commands and worship only him? In other words, now that we're here, are you in or not?

Joshua reminds them of all God has done for them, how God called Abraham and made his offspring many. How God gave him Isaac, and to him, he gave Jacob and Esau. How he rescued the people from Egypt and gave them Moses to guide them. God has been faithful. He has brought them through. Finally, Joshua challenges them again---today you must choose who you will serve.

Before he gives them a chance to respond, Joshua chides them. Even if you don't choose to be faithful to God, you'll still serve something. Will it be the gods of your ancestors or the gods of this new land? Joshua knows these people well. He understands exactly what will undermine their faithful choosing. But Joshua has made his decision: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Like the Israelites, we face many distractions, temptations and idols that keep us from choosing God. We are tempted to return to our old gods, even when God has offered us new life. We revert to what's familiar, allowing our faith to become a relic of the past, some outdated vestige that keeps us looking backward. Others of us are more likely to follow the crowd. We pick and choose what fits with the culture around us, so we blend in and fade away.

We must answer Joshua too... Who will we choose to serve? Will we nurture our faith so it thrives as a living, life-giving anchor in our lives? Will we ask the God question – weaving faith into our whole lives so that it informs our relationships, our work, our spending, our everything?

Our choices matter. As poet Robert Frost famously wrote, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."

We can choose to love, or we can choose to hate. We can choose to forgive, or we can choose to take revenge; to have hope, or we can choose to fall into despair. No matter what we decide, it matters. We make our choices, then our choices make us.

But lest all this decision making begins to take its toll, we cannot forget one key factor...God has already chosen us. In Deuteronomy 7, Moses explains, "The Lord your God has chosen you to be his people because he loves you and keeps his promises.

In John, Jesus says, "You did not choose me, I chose you." Paul writes, "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.

God has chosen you too! He created you and loves you. God did not choose us because of our goodness, but because of his grace---Not because of our faith, but because of his faithfulness. We seek God because God seeks us. We aren't chosen because we found Jesus, we found Jesus because we are chosen. The invitation is always there. Each and every morning, we are invited to choose again.

God sent his Son to save the whole world. He has a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. He came to reconcile all things to himself that the whole world might be saved through him. Our choosing doesn't save us. God has already has!

There is mystery and mutuality to our covenant relationship with God. The choosing goes both ways...the way people say a wedding dress chose them, a college or a career, a puppy or a partner. Tyler Perry says, "The road that I'm on is a path that I didn't choose. It chose me. I'm just trying to walk it, and to do the best that I can to honor and respect it." We partner with God in the unfolding of our lives.

So as we look to the school year ahead, this new season that lies before us, let us choose this day who we will serve...knowing that God has already chosen us, knowing that there is nothing we can do to make God unchoose us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For there is nowhere we can go where God is not. If we ascend to heaven, God is there. If we wander in darkness, God is there. If we fly away and stay across the sea, even there God's hand holds us fast. When we come to the very end—we are still with God... We are still chosen, and still free to choose...

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.