

Life Choices  
Joshua 24:14,15

We are coming to the end of our self-discovery journey. Some of you are glad because when the journey ends so does the homework! But hopefully, most of you are sad to see the journey end because it's been a good journey.

Next week's message will be the last of the series. I hope that you've enjoyed the journey and that it's been helpful. I hope that this journey has helped you to understand who you are and what you do best.

God has all kinds of good works that he wants us to do (see Eph. 2:10). He prepares us for these good works by giving us various life gifts and spiritual gifts. And then he motivates us to do these good works by giving us different passions.

Listen carefully. God has given us everything we need to do what he wants us to do. You and I have the potential to fulfill our divine calling. But to make this happen, you and I have to make the choice to do it.

Life is about choices. We all have choices to make. And we all have the freedom to choose whatever we want. But once we make our choices, we cannot choose our consequences. That's why it's so important to make good choices ...the choices God wants us to make.

About thirty-four hundred years ago (around 1365 B.C.), Joshua, a man of God, encouraged and challenged the people of Israel to make a choice. He challenged them to get rid of their Egyptian idols and serve the Lord (see Josh. 24:14,15).

Most Americans don't consider themselves idol worshipers. We don't worship idols in this country. Idol worship is ancient ...archaic ...a thing of the past. Americans are modern ...progressive ... advanced. Yes and no. While it's true that we don't see too many "golden calves" on street corners and in front yards, it's NOT true that idol worship is a thing of the past.

Idol worship is still around ... it's just different. Worship of the golden calf has been replaced by worship of the "American Dream." The Egyptian idols are gone, but they've been replaced by American idols – idols of fame, fortune, fashion, power, sexual freedom, etc.

As followers of Jesus, you and I may not "worship" these American idols, but far too often these idols (which can and do satisfy for a season) get us off track and prevent us from experiencing a fulfilled life. So I want to encourage and challenge you to stay away from these idols and serve the Lord. Stay focused on who you are in Christ and what Christ calls you to do. THIS is what will give you real joy ...joy that lasts. THIS is how you experience a fulfilled life ... a life that satisfies (see John 10:10)!

This morning I'd like to talk about life choices – how we choose to use our time, especially our "free time" ...time when we can do whatever we want to do. [If "whatever we want to do" time is "free time," is the time we spend at work earning a living "slave time"? I guess we could look at it that way.]

As we talk about how we use our free time, I'd like us consider three questions.

First, "Do my values match how I use my time?" This is what I say is important to me. Does my time usage reflect what I value? Am I walking my talk?

Second, "Is my time flexible enough to allow me to align with God's purposes?" Am I so busy doing "good things" that I can't do the great things that God wants me to do?

Third, “Are my current life choices my enemy or my ally? Are my life choices helping me to be the person God wants me to be or are my current life choices keeping me from being the person God wants me to be?”

Let’s talk about life choices.

As followers of Jesus you and I SHOULD be following Jesus. That’s what it comes down to, right? That’s the bottom line. We realize, of course, that we don’t follow Jesus perfectly, but hopefully we are striving to be more and more like him. We’re all works in progress.

Let’s put this in the context of life choices. If following Jesus is our goal (and it should be), then it would make sense to look at how Jesus made HIS life choices. Knowing how Jesus made HIS life choices will help us to understand how God wants us to make OUR life choices.

As I look at the life and teachings of Jesus and the choices he made, I see four things that he always kept in mind ... things WE need to keep in mind as we make OUR life choices.

First and foremost, as we make our life choices, we need to put first things first – we need align with the will and way of the Lord. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.”

Turn with me to Luke 10:38-42. Here we find Jesus in Bethany at the home of Martha and Mary. In Luke 10:38-42 we read, “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village [Bethany – this village was about two miles east of Jerusalem] where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him [Jesus] and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’ [It’s not good to give the Lord orders! But Jesus was cool about it.] ‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things [getting all the different food ready], but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’”

Mary put first things first. She chose what was best. When Jesus spoke, she listened. Sitting at his feet was more important than setting the table.

It’s important to serve the Lord. But doing things FOR the Lord must never become more important than our relationship WITH the Lord. That’s what Jesus is telling us in Luke 10:38-42.

What Martha did was good. I’m sure Jesus was glad that Martha had prepared a meal for him. But what Mary did was best. She took the time to be with Jesus.

It takes time to develop a good relationship with Jesus. As followers of Jesus we need to make sure that we make time to be with him.

We can spend time with God in a variety of meaningful ways. Certain ways tend to work better for certain personality types. Suggested spiritual practices are listed for each personality type on two of the pages of your handout. If the spiritual practices listed under your personality type don’t work for you, try something else. Figure out what works best and make time to spend time with God.

Listen carefully. Nothing is more important than our relationship with Jesus Christ. Nothing! As we make our life choices, we need to put first things first.

Second, as we make our life choices we need to know our mission. What is it that God wants you to do?

Jesus knew his mission. He knew what he was called to do.

Turn with me to Mark 1:29-38. “As soon as they [Jesus and his disciples] left the synagogue [in Capernaum], they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand, and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby village – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come . . .’”

Jesus knew that his mission was to spread the good news about the kingdom of God. This meant that once people had heard his teachings and witnessed his miracles, he moved on. Jesus could have done a lot of good things in Capernaum. I’m sure there were plenty of urgent needs among the people in the city. But his mission and priorities led Jesus to move on. He said “no” to some good things so that he could do a great thing – the thing his Father had called him to do.

What is your mission? What is it that God has called you to do?

God has called all of us to love him and people and make disciples of Jesus. Just as there are many ways to spend time with God, there are many ways to love God and people and make disciples of Jesus. Where do you fit in? What good works does God have in mind for you to do?

Identifying your life gifts, spiritual gifts, personality type, values, and passion will help you to determine your mission ... your unique place in life ... what God designed you to do. Knowing your mission and taking it seriously will help you to determine your priorities and make the right life choices.

Third, as we make our life choices we need to know our limits.

Turn with me to Mark 6:30-44. In Mark 6:32, Jesus and his disciples are on their way to a solitary place for some “R and R.” When Jesus sees the large crowd following them, he is filled with compassion and teaches for the rest of the day (v.33). Later, at dinnertime, Jesus miraculously feeds the large crowd (5,000 men plus women and children) with five loaves of bread and two fish (v. 38-44). After this miraculous feeding, we’re told in Mark 6:45,46 that “Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went into the hills to pray.”

As I look at the life of Jesus, one thing that’s obvious is that he loved people. He demonstrated his love for people by serving them in various ways. For the most part Jesus put others first. But even he had his limits. Jesus understood that the spiritual, mental, and physical demands on your body cannot be met if you don’t take the time to rest and replenish the spirit. And because he understood this, there were times when he stopped serving and took off into the hills to pray.

Where do you go and what do you do to rest and replenish your spirit? Do you read? Do you pray? Do you take a hike? Do you listen to music? Do you eat breakfast with a friend?

Listen carefully. If you don't take care of yourself ...if you're not good to yourself, you won't be much good to others. Know your limits. Make time to nourish yourself.

Put first things first. Know your mission. Know your limits. And finally, make choices that simplify your life. Jesus lived a simple life.

Life was never meant to be as complicated as it is (perhaps I should say "as we make it"). One of the things that complicates life is stuff – you know, possessions. Stuff takes up so much of our time.

First, we shop for stuff. Then we pay for stuff. Then we use stuff. Then we clean stuff. Then we store stuff. Then we organize stuff. Then we shop for more stuff and pay for more stuff and use more stuff and clean more stuff and store more stuff and organize more stuff. Do we really need so much stuff?

Stuff can complicate! You and I need to simplify. No one can define simplicity for you. One person's simplicity is another person's nightmare. And any attempt to define simplicity can easily lead to legalism. The point I'm trying to make is that we need to take a good look at what we have and how we spend our time. If something is keeping us from our priorities – what we know we should do ...what we know is important – we need to make some changes ...we need to make some different choices ... we need to simplify. If we simplify our life it'll be easier for us to serve the Lord and support his work.

Your life choices matter to God. He's cares about your use of time. Are you using your time in such a way that one day Jesus will say to you , "Well done, good and faithful servant"? I hope and pray that you are.

That's it, for now. I'd like you to do two pages of your handout for homework. One page is titled "Thinking Through Your Life Choices." The other is titled "For Journal or Discussion." I've also included two pages that list practical ways to weave the four principles we talked about into your life. It's all about choices ...making the right choices. Choose this day whom you will serve!