

TRAINING YOUTH TO MAKE POSITIVE DECISIONS

J.J. Turner, Ph.D.

Three birds are perched on a limb. Two decide to fly off. How many are left? All three! How is that? A decision without action is no more than a statement or a wish.

From the moment we wake up to the moment we fall asleep, we are confronted with a multitude of decisions. How we choose and activate these decisions have an amazing impact on every area of our lives. We can't avoid decisions. A decision not to make a decision is a decision not to do anything, which is a decision. To say, "I can't decide," is a decision.

What's the best decision you have ever made?

What's the worst decision you have ever made?

Do you know who made the first decision recorded in history? Do you know the context of that decision? If you guessed it was Eve, you are right. The story is very familiar. God created a beautiful garden—the Garden of Eden—and placed man in it to work, live and enjoy the perfect and good life.

God could have given them "1001" laws to obey—"dos and don'ts." But He chose to give them one basic "thou shall not" command. Wow! What a deal. Adam and Eve could have it all, except one tree: *"And the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you SHALL NOT EAT, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'"* (Genesis 2:15-17). A simple and easy to understand command.

Can you imagine standing in front of a candy counter with 100 pieces of the best candy in the world? The owner tells you can have 99 pieces of candy but the one back in the corner, the 100th, is reserved—you can't have it. What would your response be? Would you want the one piece you couldn't have? Well as you know, that's what our greatest grandmother, Eve, did.

Satan confronted her with a choice—a decision. She could obey God and stay in the garden as Adam's helper or she could choose to disobey God and obey Satan's lie that she would become a god (Genesis 3:1-6). As we already know she made the wrong decision (Genesis 3:7-

24). As a result of her decision sin and death entered the world, and was passed down to all mankind; and Adam and Even was driven out of Paradise. The power of ONE DECISION! Amazing.

The Importance of Decision Making

I doubt that Adam and Eve had any idea of the implication their decision would have on all their ancestors in the human race. One immediate consequence was one of their sons killed his brother. It touches everyone—*“All have sinned”*—(*Romans 3:23; 6:23*).

We need to be continually aware of the implications, as well as the possible consequences, of how decisions have an impact on our lives as well as on the lives of others. “No man is an island.” Here are some basic reminders related to the importance of decisions:

1. There is a great possibility that every decision you make will affect, in one way or another, many other people. Therefore, we need to be aware of the influence we have on others, both in and out of the church.
2. When a decision is made it demonstrates what we value, what our morals and ethics are, as well as the level of trust that may be placed in us. We are our decisions.
3. When we make a decision we demonstrate what is important in our lives. What we are—our decisions—speak more loudly than what we say. “What you are speaks so loudly that I can’t hear what you are saying.” An amazing truth.
4. When we made a decision it is an example to those who know us, follow us, and are judging our approach to life. It is the old “follow the leader” game that never ends.
5. A decision is proof that we desire to move forward—to make a change by taking a chance—moving from status quo to the winner’s circle.
6. A decision is unavoidable, that is, if we desire to get ahead in life. We can’t simply stay at indecision nor I’ll make the move tomorrow. Procrastination is a killer of progress.
7. A decision means that things will not be like they were before. It will be a new day, a new way, and new challenges and opportunities.
8. The importance of decisions is seen in the fact that God created us with the ability and freedom to make decisions. Therefore, we must make them wisely (cf. Joshua 24:15).

Model for Making Decision

How do you make your decisions? What process do you use, if any?

There are numerous programs, suggestions and models for making great decisions. Here is my personal one that I have found to be practical but powerful. It is also a powerful tool for personal motivation.

AWARENESS:

It is difficult, if not impossible, to do something you are not aware of. It's like you can't be somewhere you haven't gone. Let's say the local grocery store needs a bag boy, pays good bucks, and will work around your school schedule. If you are not aware of the need you can't respond to it. Then one day you see the ad in the store window. You go inside and ask to speak to the manager. The process of awareness has begun.

UNDERSTANDING:

You have had no experience in bagging groceries. In fact, this will be your first job. You ask questions, listen carefully, and watch a video the manager shares. You now understand the big picture relative to what will be involved in working as a bag boy. Understanding what is required: duties, dress, hours, breaks, etc. contributes to whether you want the job or not.

BELIEVE:

You have moved to the third step in self-motivation and making a decisions. You have listened carefully, asked meaningful questions, and understood the video. You believe you can do the job, as well as believe the manager will be a great boss. There is security in believing.

CARE:

In this step you have to do some soul-searching. How much do you care about what you have heard? How much do you really care about working for the store? How much do you care about being the best bag boy possible? How much do you care about earning money for work?

ACCEPTANCE:

You have moved through the (1) awareness step, (2) understanding step, (3) believing step, (4) caring step, and now you are ready to accept the job. You have done the basic work relative to making the decision. You have exemplified the basic steps in making a decision.

CHANGE:

Accepting the job requires that you develop a new schedule. Your school hours are set, but you will have to adjust your study and extra-curricular activities to fit your new daily work schedule on the new job at the grocery store. Change is a major adjustment in life but going through this, or a similar process, will make it smoother.

ADJUSTMENTS:

It is rare that after making an activated decision that you don't have to make a few, or a number, of adjustments. You take time to take stock and honestly evaluate your personal feelings after a few days, week, or months on the job. What, if anything, do you need to adjust? Why?

Notice how this process relates to every area of life. It is the model most successful salespersons use, knowingly or unknowingly. Let's take evangelism—sharing the Gospel with a friend:

First, you must create an awareness by helping the prospect see that he or she is not saved—separated from God—lost. This will take time to share the Scriptures.

Second, the lost person must understand what being lost means, as well as what it means to have Christ as the only Savior.

Third, the prospect must believe before he or she can go on in the process of becoming a Christian. Again, this will take time, patience, and sharing the truth.

Fourth, this is a critical point. The lost person must care about his or her eternal destiny: heaven or hell. They must care about the salvation of their souls and serving God.

Fifth, acceptance is the place you have prayed and work to become a reality. The prospect has accepted the truth, believing Jesus Christ is the Son of God and desires to be baptized into Christ.

Sixth, the lost person "Puts on Christ" (Galatians 3:27), he takes the steps of faith that change his destiny in time and eternity.

Seventh, the saved person now begins a life of adjustment as he works on adding the "*Fruit of the Spirit*" to his new lifestyle. He worships God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24).

Hindrances to Making Decisions

“And Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people answered him not a word” (1 Kings 18:21). This is a classic case of people refusing to make a decision. One man, Elijah, stepped forward championing God’s cause. Numerous things hinder activated decisions.

The prophet Joel addressed the attitude of indecision with these words: *“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:14).* Look around! Everywhere you look there are multitudes “in the valley of decision” — knowing they need to make a decision but failing to do so. Even some Christians are in this group. Why? Here are some reasons why persons fail to make decisions:

1. They don’t know how to make decisions. They have never been trained in the art and skill of making decisions. This is a must for every Christian.
2. They are afraid to make a mistake. They freeze in their tracks with the fear of making a mistake or being wrong, which will lead to rejection and ridicule.
3. They are lazy or procrastinate relative to taking the time and energy needed to make effective decisions. It’s the “I’ll get-around-to-it” maybe tomorrow.
4. They are not willing to make the sacrifice or change that is required if they make the decision. They drift in their comfort zone.
5. They are reluctant or ashamed to ask for help or seek counsel relative to a decision; even small ones are viewed as high mountains they must climb alone or not at all.
6. They do not fully understand that decision making is the royal road to success in every area of life. They think of decision making as being the territory of business, etc.
7. They do not understand what God’s word says about making decisions. It is a thread that runs from Genesis to Revelation. *“Choose you this day” (Joshua 24:15).*

What are some major decisions you need to make and act upon them? How will you intentionally use this lesson in making better decisions?