

## You Are What You Choose

### Choosing Life

John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

Given 22-Oct-05; Sermon #FT05-05-AM

This sermon is a follow-up to my previous message, and though it is again primarily intended for those younger among us, it applies also equally well to those of any age group.

The world around us is a formidable environment with which we are faced. It seems so large when compared to a single person, and it may appear as though all the good jobs are already taken. The technology is so far advanced that few, if any, frontiers of science are left to be unexplored. The economy appears right on the edge of collapsing, and that the tensions between nations are such that life seemingly may hang in the balance at any given moment. It seems too that we are being carried along with the tide of our environment.

Young people, if you will lift up your eyes away from the computer screen and think seriously about where your life is headed, the future indeed is shaky. Now do you really want to be just carried along? So many nations have atomic and hydrogen weapons that all it would take would be for one madman losing control of himself to set off a chain reaction of nuclear warfare. While these things may be true on the surface if one only looks at the world from one perspective, there is a factor that most people on earth do not consider deeply at all until their life may hang in the balance, and that factor is God and His purpose.

As we begin this sermon I want you to look with me at several scriptures that first appear to be saying the same thing. The first of these is in Psalm 50.

**Psalm 50:9-12** I will take no bullock out of your house, nor he goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.

From there, let us go to Exodus 19 where something similar is said, but not quite the same.

**Exodus 19:5** Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.

**Deuteronomy 10:12-14** And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command you this day for your good? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S your God, the earth also, with all that therein is.

**Job 41:11** Who has preceded me, that I should repay him? Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine.

All those verses undoubtedly have something in common. Each actually appears in a different setting, and thus there are variations in what they mean. In Psalm 50, God is saying rather sarcastically to mankind, "I don't need anything from you. What can you possibly give Me that I don't already have?"

In Exodus 19, He says to the people with whom He is making the covenant, "I want you to consider this, Israel. I could have picked anybody to give these blessings to, but I chose you." Thus, He is providing them with an important basic proof, a foundation for humble understanding that what they are given did not come to them because they earned them, but was entirely due to an act of mercy on His part. What we have there is a "them" and "us" comparison.

In the Deuteronomy 10 example He is telling them that He requires obedience to His law, and that He has every right to do this because He not only owns them, but the whole earth besides, therefore giving emphasis to His right.

Finally, in Job 41 He sends out a powerful challenge by comparing Himself as greater than the monstrous Leviathan that is mentioned in verse one. "And therefore, Job, since you dare not challenge Leviathan, and I am greater than him, who is going to stand against Me? Who is going to stop Me from doing whatever it is that **I** want to do?" He is saying that He created the earth and everything on it, and that He gave life to everything on earth. "So who among you, Job, is powerful enough to stop Me from doing what I want?"

When we put all four of these factors together, one can see that we are dealing with a Being of incredible power that supports His other resources of loving wisdom, generosity, wealth, mercy, and determination to succeed in His purpose. But how do we find mankind reacting to Him today?

Let us go back to II Peter 3 where we began the previous sermon.

**II Peter 3:1-4** This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

God inspired Peter to make a penetrating observation on an attitude that would be prevalent just before Christ returns when mankind is so full of boasting in the presumed greatness of its understanding, wisdom, and especially the power of its technology. And so mankind, by means of conduct, declares that there is no Creator God, that evolution—blind chance—is the source of all things, and that everything is going on now as it has always been despite the fact that never has mankind lived in a time as dangerous as is this period right now.

Now, teens, are you just being carried along, or are you determining the course of your life?

I think we need to ask ourselves a rather obvious question. Does not history reveal that man's past is anything but a record of fearful warfare and slavery

of various sorts? Most of the time mankind seems like a pinball bouncing back and forth, completely at the mercy of forces beyond its control. And yet men love to give the impression that they have everything under control, and that they have the wisdom and the power to make our future secure.

God's challenge that no one can stop Him becomes very important in a situation like this, because mankind *is* going to use its vaunted technology against one another with devastating effects. Mankind has always used every weapon that it has invented, and we are going to follow the same course. Jesus had something to say about this in regard to how far this is going to be carried in this dangerous world.

**Matthew 24:21** For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

That verse is a parallel of Jeremiah 30:1-7—the time of Jacob's trouble, unique in all of the history of man.

**Matthew 24:22** And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.

He is not talking about spiritual salvation. He is talking about life being completely and totally wiped from the face of the earth. Man *will* use the weapons that are available to him, and there is going to be nuclear warfare, biological warfare, chemical warfare, and electronic warfare. Water is going to be poisoned. The very soil of the earth is going to be poisoned. The very air that we breathe is going to be charged with radioactivity. It will go on until God steps in and stops the warfare short of what would be produced: the death of everybody.

I saw in the newspaper headlines just this week that one out of four GIs [soldiers] returning from Iraq is returning sick. Do you know what it is very likely from? It is very likely from these big blockbuster bombs that we dropped on the soil over there and in the caves, or whatever. Those bombs have small amounts of nuclear material in them, and we have poisoned the soil of Iraq with radioactivity.

The Defense Department throws up their hands like they are ignorant of what is going on. It looks very much like the United States of America has brought the wiping out of Iraq right to it with all this radioactivity. Those poor people cannot escape to the United States. They are there because they live there, and they are being poisoned by particles of dust—*radioactive* dust.

There is nothing that you and I can do to stop what I have just described from occurring, and the reason is simple. It is not that God has willed it be this way, but almost 6,000 years of mankind's recorded history gives powerful evidence that mankind will not change from the direction that was set, and it continues to follow. Mankind is making a tragic mistake in assuming that technology is a powerful indication that we are getting better; but technology and human nature are not equally divided in their strength. It is human nature that is in control of mankind, and human nature is not getting any better. It has not changed since the Garden of Eden.

Even though our Creator came as a man, giving ample demonstration of who He was and what His purpose is, mankind, in the persons of the Jews and the Romans, put Him to death. Regardless of what people He appeared before, they would have done the same thing had they been Chinese, Indian, or whatever, because of one simple thing: human nature. The carnal mind is at war with God. It is not subject to the law of God. The Jews and the Romans just did what comes naturally, and all of mankind is following the same path today, but with far more powerful weapons than any generation has ever produced before.

It has taken 2,000 more years from Christ's death for the technology to be developed so mankind can apply the *coup de grace* in itself, and so here we are, just about ready to face it. How close it is, I do not know. Is it a generation away? I do not know. I certainly want Jesus Christ to be ruling over this earth, but I will tell you frankly, I do not want to face the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. I do not want *anybody* to have to face it, but it is coming because mankind is showing that it is not going to turn aside.

Now, kids and young adults, you can choose to do as the Jews and the Romans did in the first century, or you can choose to cast your lot with God as the original disciples did. I am appealing to you to not take this lightly,

because making the covenant with God is serious business, and Christianity is not an easy way of life.

Self-gratification has always been the order of the day, but self-denial is the order of the day for the Christian, and choosing this is not something to be done on a mere emotional whim. The choosing has to be done with sincere and honest thought regarding what it is going to cost you. You must begin by understanding this. As we briefly saw in my previous sermon, you are sanctified by your parents' calling and conversion. The way to God is open to you, but you still must choose. That power is in your hands, and by that power you can control your destiny to a very great degree.

Here are some questions to answer, because I want you to know that our lives are largely controlled and formed around the choices we make. I want to approach you as a rational adult and not as a mere child being ordered to do something. That is the way Abraham and God talked, only you are not responding to me. You do it in your head. Just answer these things in your head.

**1:** Are you even aware that you have the freedom of choice before God to set your destiny?

**2:** Do you ever think about the responsibility having that right imposes upon you?

**3:** What makes you do what you do? What is it, or *who* is it, that is pulling your strings? From the evidence of your actions, which only you know (I do not know them), who does it point to that you look to for leadership, and choose to follow? I will give you some ideas. Is it political figures? Entertainment celebrities? Athletes? Rock musicians? Fashion models? We could go on and on here, but you get the point. Who is it that influences you to do what you *allow* yourself to do?

**4:** *Why* do you choose to wear the clothing you wear? Is it because your friends are wearing such and such, and they wear such and such simply because it is presently fashionable? So in this question

it is not "who do you follow," but "why," and it is directed specifically at clothing.

**5:** Do you understand that when you reach adulthood that you and you alone are responsible for what you do? Are you aware of that? We reach a point in life when we cannot blame things on mom and dad, and we cannot blame it on our friends. You blame it on number one: yourself.

**6:** Do you understand that even Satan, as powerful and subtle as he is, cannot pull your strings unless you choose to let him? We cannot see him because he is invisible, yet he exercises a great deal of control over this world. But even he cannot pull your strings unless you allow him to do it.

**7:** Do you understand that when you break a law of God that it does not stop to ask you how old you are? God's laws are non-discriminatory. They do not take age, race, or gender into account. You break them, they break you.

**8:** Are you even concerned what God thinks about your choices? Do you care that *He* cares? He cares, and yet He does not intervene, because He wants you free to make the choices.

Let us go to Deuteronomy 30. Before we even read these verses, let us understand a bit about the background of the whole book of Deuteronomy. Moses wrote it in the last month of his life, which coincided with the last month at the end of Israel's 40-year journey in the wilderness.

Some of the material in the book summarizes events important to what lay just ahead of them when they were to take possession of their inheritance: the lessons learned during their wilderness journey would be important to their attitude and understanding once *in* the Promised Land. The content of Deuteronomy is so important that it is the only book in the Bible that God commands it be gone through and understood at least once every seven years, thoroughly digested.

It is the only book in the entire Bible that God commanded the kings of Israel to write out longhand so that they would understand. Personally, I believe it is the most important book in the Old Testament for God's church at this time in the history of the church since Christ, because it is the book in the Old Testament that applies most directly just before you receive your inheritance.

**Deuteronomy 30:11-13** For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not hidden from you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20** See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command you this day to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the LORD your God shall bless you in the land where you go to possess it. But if your heart turn away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land, where you pass over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live: That you may love the LORD your God, and that you may obey his voice, and that you may cleave unto him: for **he is your life**, and the length of your days: that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

In verses 11 through 13, the first thing He does is establish that what He is requiring of you, and of me, and of anybody else, is not difficult to understand. Anybody with a normal intelligence can understand what this book says as it lays out our responsibility as a child of His. You do not need guys with doctors' degrees to parse every word that appears here. It is written



simply so that we can understand. You do not have to go get some guru who lives on the top of a mountain. That is what He means about you do not have to go up to heaven. You do not have to go there, or to anybody to understand this, because it has been written in simplicity.

Then He begins to establish to us that He has set before us two alternatives: life and good on the one hand, and death and evil on the other. There is nothing difficult to understand there either. Life and good equates to obedience to His commands; death and evil to disobedience.

In verse 16 He commands us to love Him. It is not hard to understand this either once we get rid of American concepts of what love is. In America, love is equated with passionate romance. Biblical love, though, is defined by the apostle John in I John 5:3 as the keeping of God's commandments, and he adds that they are not a hardship. That statement by John is a parallel of Deuteronomy 30:11-13. There is nothing hard here. Biblical love is an *action* that is exhibited by behavior, and that behavior is obedience to God.

I think I should add here that this does not mean that biblical love is devoid of feeling. Not at all. I think we ought to be able to understand that because we are affectionate, God is affectionate. He is an emotional being, but He wants us to understand rather that godly love is dominated by what it does, not what it feels. Humans get that turned around, and feeling becomes the big thing rather than doing.

In verses 17 and 18, He essentially issues a warning, saying that life is serious business. He is saying that whether or not *they* take Him seriously, *He* is serious, and that He would absolutely follow through with His part in what He is proposing to them. Now what is He proposing to them in this setting? It is a renewing of the Old Covenant, except the laws are not stated like they are in Exodus 19 and 20.

Why would He do that at this time? You will recall that circumcision was instituted by God with Abraham and it became the symbol that the person who was circumcised had made the covenant with God. The Israelitish people, following the example of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and so forth, were circumcised right up until they were in Egypt. When they left Egypt under Moses and went out into the wilderness, circumcision ended. I do not

know why it was ended. For forty years they did not circumcise their male babies. Circumcision was necessary for taking the Passover. If a man was not circumcised, he was not permitted to take the Passover.

Remember, they were just about ready to go into the land. The book of Deuteronomy was written in that last month or so, and after this occurred here in Deuteronomy 30—and maybe the rest of the book being written as well—He gave them a while to think it over. It was not like it was in Mount Sinai again where they jumped into the acceptance of the covenant immediately. He gave a bit of time for them to think it over. You can follow this through the book of Joshua. By the time you get to Joshua 5, they are in the land under Joshua, and the first thing they did was get circumcised. The covenant was now renewed. The male babies born in those forty years were [finally] circumcised.

At the beginning of verse 19 He again reinforces, warning Israel, that all that matters in heaven and earth were witnessing the proposal on His part. I take that "all that matters" primarily to be the angelic host and all of mankind who would come after this was done and would read these words of Deuteronomy. After saying that, He then commands them to choose life. That is about as clear as you can get, young people; there is your choice.

Let us make this a little bit more specific as we go on. *The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* has an interesting section on the word "choose." It says that 'choose,' 'select,' 'pick,' 'call,' and 'prefer' are synonyms of each other, but each one has a shade of meaning that distinguishes it from the other. It says that *choose* is preferred when one wants to indicate an act of the will. *Select*, on the other hand, indicates careful consideration and comparison, as in selecting the best apple in a basket. To *pick* is to select, because the thing chosen is especially well-fitted or appropriate, as in picking someone to be in the honor guard. To *cull* indicates to select and collect at the same time, as to cull certain passages from a book in which you are trying to get quotes. Finally, to *prefer* is to favor mentally without any overt act, as "I prefer sunshine to rain."

Perhaps the translators could have used any one of those five words here, but they chose the word "choose." The word "select" was almost as good, but they chose the word "choose." I think that "choose" is by far and away the

best. From the context in which God extensively works to persuade them and us, these two terms—"choose" and "select"—teach us the most. This is because God, many times in life, is going to require of us an act of the will to choose between alternatives, and then follow through by setting our will to do it. That is what Christianity takes in order for it to work. You choose the better of the alternatives, set your will, and do the better of the two. "Choose life."

In verse 20 He makes a very significant statement after once again encouraging them to love, obey, to stick to Him. That means to be loyal to Him. The significant thing He says is that "He is [our] life." This thing really has deep meaning, but we are not going to spend a lot of time on it. It is not an insignificant statement. First of all, He is saying, "You live because I gave it to you." That is the first thing He states. "You belong to Me," He is saying. "I am the most powerful being that is." It continues the thought, though, that "I can give you a bigger, greater, more better life than any other choice you might be able to make, and it ends with eternal and everlasting life." It hinges on this relationship with Him.

He can end it at any time, because we belong to Him, or He can extend it because we please Him because we are choosing life. This is a parallel of John 17. Jesus said "to know the Father and the Son *is* eternal life." That is what He is saying here. He said, "I am your life. This establishes the relationship with Me. I can stop it, or continue it. I have that power to go with My mercy, My kindness, My generosity."

Are you aware that when the Bible uses the term "eternal life" that He is not speaking about eternal in the same sense that we use the word? We use the word "eternal," meaning "neverending," but He is talking about *quality* of life, and only those who are going to live everlastingly are those who learn to live eternal life in the flesh. The way He lives eternal life is quality. To know the Father and to have an intimate relationship with Him, and to know the Son and to have an intimate relationship with Him, *is* eternal life. That is where quality of life comes from. It comes from the Father and the Son. That is why He says, "Choose life." Choose the right kind of life. You are already living, but He wants us to choose the right kind of life to live.

Young people, if you have not yet figured out what this is all about, let me explain why this is so important in just a few sentences. Life consists of a constant stream of choices, and in each choice, (especially those concerning moral and spiritual issues), we are developing character for good or for bad. There is no way to avoid having to make choices because the events of life, the circumstances of life are going to force them on you, and they are going to give you opportunity to choose for good or bad, for life or death. In many cases, just having to choose is going to happen a score of times in a day. We have the opportunity to make a choice for good or for bad. There is no way to avoid having to make choices.

Are you going to control being in control over what you produce in life, or is somebody else going to force their choices on you? Let us qualify that a little bit. Understand that God permits others like your parents and civil authorities to impose their choices on you, and then you have to choose whether to submit. They have that right from God to impose choices. Then our choice is: are we going to submit? If the law says go 55 mph, are we going to submit to that? That is our choice, but it happens, and it is forced on you.

The overwhelming number of times you are going to find that these authorities are right in terms of good. As you begin to think it through, you will see this. Most of the time parents are going to be right. The civil authorities are going to be right, and you then have to choose between going to war by your choice, or to produce good character, and submit. It will be what you choose to allow that will guide you.

I received an email from John Reid, and I am going to give it to you right now because what the email said is appropriate. It was about a Cherokee Indian grandfather who was telling his grandson that there were two wolves living inside him. One of those wolves was good, and one was evil. The grandfather said that the evil wolf is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, unforgiveness, superiority, and ego. Now the good wolf is joy, peace, unconditional love, forgiveness, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The grandson thought about it for awhile, and then he asked his grandfather

which one wins. The grandfather said, "The one you choose to feed." There is a lot of wisdom encapsulated in that little illustration. This is what I mean about, "Who is going to control your destiny?" Are you going to let others do it, or are you going to choose to feed the right side, if I can put it that way, of your life?

I am going to give you a series of major choices that you must make if your life is going to be successful to the degree that I know that you would very much like it to be. I want to warn you in advance here that they are not easily accomplished. They must be patiently worked on, but if they are, they will gradually be perfected, and I guarantee you they will produce good.

**Choice 1:** You *must* choose the right set of standards to live by.  
This is going to set your goals, especially morally and spiritually.

This proverb from Proverbs 14:12 is so important that it appears twice in the book of Proverbs.

**Proverbs 14:12** There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

I think the key words in this piece of advice for us right here are "seems right" and "death." So, young people, think. Here we are, born into an already-made world that on the surface, because we do not know any better, is attractive and appealing to human nature. Satan, using human nature, has created this world, and he is evilly smart, and he has created a world that is very attractive to human nature, and therefore it is something that we easily buy our way into, making *it* our way.

This way is not something we buy into in a sense of deliberately choosing it over other alternatives, because when we are born the alternatives are unknown to us. Rather though, it is simply accepted and made one's own. Why? Because everybody else seems to be headed in much the same direction, and therefore it makes it much more easily perceived as being right.

When we look beyond the surface of this way out there that seems right, what we see is that this way that seems so right is what has produced all the death we see from wars, famines, disease, and murder, and on and on. Never

forget Deuteronomy 30 where God commanded us to deliberately choose life. Abundant life is what is produced by God's way as outlined by His Word, or more specifically, by His law.

The ready-made world's way produced death in any number of horrible ways. God's Word teaches us His standard of behavior, and He guarantees His standard, if used, will work to produce life, but it must be deliberately chosen, and then followed by a setting of the will. This particular point is by far and away the single most important of the suggestions that I am going to give you. Most peoples' standards are no higher than the group they associate with. I hope you will understand this, that they are selling themselves out. When it is looked at spiritually, they are actually prostituting themselves to the world around them so that they can have fun—be accepted.

One of the results that is so clearly seen from Pam Stenzel's film of last night is that girls often become pregnant as a teen, and the guy becomes a father of an unwanted child. Some become addicted to alcohol, and some to other drugs. Many drop out of school or are frequently absent, while others live only for the social scene or athletics, and their lives are being wasted because of low standards.

I heard a radio talk-show host in Charlotte give a brief formula for what he considered would be a good measure of worldly success. It consisted of only four short points, but each one of them was pretty sound-minded. He was telling this to the young people who were listening, and of course the parents too, hoping that they would get the point and maybe teach them to their children.

**Point A:** At the very least, finish high school so there is at least some educational base there.

**Point B:** Do not sell your future out by allowing yourself to get involved in *any* teenage sex.

**Point C:** Get a job and *stay* employed, even while you are in high school.

**Point D:** When the time comes to marry, be *faithful*, and stay married.

I know these points are very general and simplistic, but they are nonetheless right and good, with honorable standards that one should shoot for. So young people, you need to be questioning and discussing standards within your family so your family can rightly help guide you to decide what *your* standards ought to be.

Young people, what do you believe with enough intensity that you are willing to stand up for it? This is why God's standards require such thoughtful consideration. Virtually everything around you will be working to pull you down to the lowest common denominator or behavior, and with Christianity, one has to fight to stay on course.

Let me give you an example that I know you may know very well, but it is a tremendous example. I am talking about Joseph, back in Genesis 39. Joseph was an unusually bright young man that you might say really had the world—all kinds of carnal success—right at his fingertips.

**Genesis 39:7-10** And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master knows not what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand: There is none greater in this house than I; neither has he kept back any thing from me but you, because you are his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.

**Genesis 39:12** And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

Do you understand that Joseph deliberately chose public exposure, embarrassment, and prison rather than break God's standard that he had made *his* standard?

**Genesis 41:39-40** And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God has showed you all this, there is none so discreet and wise as you are: You shall be over my house, and according unto your word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than you.

We could go on there, but it is clear. Do you get the point? This example is in the Bible for all of us to learn from. Yes, there are going to be difficulties in keeping God's way, but Joseph chose God's way, and then God showed you and me what the payoff was. It was life! When you have God on your side, you have everything on your side.

**Choice number 2:** You need to deliberately choose to develop a relationship with God. Just setting His standards as your standards of and by itself, as good as it is, is not enough. You have to work to develop a relationship with Him.

Turn now to Proverbs 8. Here is what God can give you within the relationship, and it is why He says He is our life.

**Proverbs 8:8-11** All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. [Righteousness here means right doing. He can show us how to do things right, even things that are *not* written in His Word. He can put the thoughts into our mind. There is nothing froward or perverse in them. He will never mislead us.] They are all plain to him that understands, and right to them that find knowledge. Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it [compared to what can be gotten out of this relationship].

**Proverbs 8:32-36** Now therefore hearken unto me, O you children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that hears me, watching



daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso finds me finds life, and shall obtain favor of the LORD. But he that sins against me wrongs his own soul: all they that hate me love *death*.

Those are pretty strong words. Sections like this undoubtedly motivated James to write, "God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift." To you all, understand that He is the source of eternal life—the way He lives.

I will not pursue this choice out as far as it could go, but all of you know that there are a fairly large number of successful biblical characters, great leaders, heroes, who already had a vibrant relationship with God when they were clearly in their teens: Isaac, Joseph, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and without doubt, Jesus. We see Him at age twelve confounding people in the Temple. Very likely John the Baptist, and Timothy too. Not one of these men was a wallflower, but they were leaders with strong personalities who drew others to them in order to magnify the good that they accomplished by their sterling example.

**Choice number 3:** Choose to develop a strong relationship with your parents. Notice I said "develop." It does not just happen. This is a two-way street of course, and your parents can help a great deal by doing their part. If they do it correctly, they open the door for you to be able to use that relationship well.

Young people, on your part, this choice is often going to require a great deal of courage, combined with humility. Parents can be scary. That is where the courage comes in. Young people, when you get up to your teen years you may be as big and strong as your dad, and stronger and bigger than your mother, but you may respect them a bit, and the courage may still be needed. But boy! Here is where the humility comes in.

Are you aware that humility is a choice? It does not happen naturally either. We choose voluntarily to put ourselves below another, so it is going to take some courage and humility. But young people, learn something from wisdom. These two qualities are the stuff of real leadership, and thus success in life. If you are humble, kids, *you will take advice*.

Do you understand that some of the poorest people on earth, especially in the United States and Canada, are *proud* people? They refuse to take the advice on how to get prosperity. They are stubborn and proud. Your parents can help you greatly to be successful if you will humble yourself and listen quietly and respectfully to the advice and counsel they can give you. Sometimes the courage is even more necessary, mixed with humility, because the parents really have not earned your respect by doing things right. That happens.

I want to give you a principle that really will govern relationships in almost every situation. Remember this. It will help you tremendously in God's way of doing things. The one who is in authority commands. The one who is *under* authority beseeches. Do you understand that? They plead. They ask. Parents have the right from God to issue orders to their children. Children do not have the right to issue orders to their parents. You ask. If you throw that principle of God's government out, I guarantee you, kids, that you are going to suffer, and you are going to bring pain upon your parents too. It still takes courage and humility to do those things.

Sometimes parents are unreasonably irritable because they do not want to be bothered. That is a shame, but it is true. If it is true in your family where your parents are cutting you off short, you have to choose to humble yourself before it anyway. You cannot allow yourself to batter your way through it. Remember the verses I gave to you in Exodus the other day. By batter, I mean either strike them, or curse them. That will not please God at all, and it is not going to go well for you. You have to choose your part. It takes time to learn these principles correctly.

Turn to Proverbs 15. Learn this, young people.

**Proverbs 15:1** A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

I said before, you have your choice. You can submit, or you can start a war. Which is it going to be? The world's way is to start a war. It has been doing it for 6,000 years.

**Proverbs 15:5** A fool despises his father's instruction: but he that regards reproof is prudent [is wise].

This may not be a hundred percent right, but if I were a betting man I would say that what your old man tells you has more chance of being right than what you think.

What you young people need to do in your situations with your family is to take the kind of leadership God gives you, choose to be calm, to be conciliatory, to be as non-judgmental as you can. That is a bit of wisdom you need to put to work.

**Choice number 4:** Choose your friends wisely.

We are going to look at Proverbs 1:10-19. When we read through that you will see this is the lesson not just for that particular context, but for any situation in which you are lured into, participating in some form of behavior which is going to either break the law of God, or it is going to break the commands that your father and mother give you.

**Proverbs 1:10-19** My son, if sinners entice you, consent you not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privately for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privately for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which takes away the life of the owners thereof.

The enticement that comes from peers (the ones you are hanging out with, and especially if they are a bad group) is going to be, that by running with them, you will gain. See, there will be profit in it for you, whatever that gain happens to be. The implication right within that instruction between verses

10 and 19 is that if you run with this group, your gain is going to be without cost. Do not you believe it! There is no free lunch, and it is stupid to think that in situations like this that there really is something for nothing. It cannot be done.

I once heard a sermon somewhat similar to this in which the minister encouraged teens to be a thermostat rather than a thermometer. Do you know the difference between the two? A thermometer only reflects the environment it is in. A thermostat *sets* the environment, and whether anybody in that group wants to go along with you, you still be a thermostat, and maybe some of those others will turn into thermometer and follow you instead. But whether they do or not is not the issue. The issue is you. What do *you* do? Be a thermostat.

Let us look at a scripture in I Corinthians 15. This is a very important point and another principle to always remember. We had an article not very long ago regarding peer pressure.

**I Corinthians 15:33-34** Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

The shame is that they were even running with these people and allowing themselves to be influenced.

**Choice number 5:** Choose what type of occupation you will go into. (This is one of the least important, but it is still helpful)

**Proverbs 13:11** Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathers by labor shall increase.

The reason for this is that being employed tends to be a strong stabilizing force in a person's life. I will show you how important this is. Working is so important that when Israel went into their inheritance, God gave everybody a piece of land so they had no excuse not to work. Employment tends to be a strong stabilizing force.

If you had a new car, which road would you choose to ride on? A smooth paved road, or a rocky, rutted, dusty back road? I know what your choice would be, but I once read a book with a clever title. It was, "If you don't know where you're going, you're going to end up somewhere else." It is kind of a catchy thing, but the author's point was this: If you do not begin plotting your life to reach certain goals in regard to employment, the future is going to be here before you know it, and you will have gotten absolutely nowhere. But if you have a job, your life is going to stabilize because you want to accomplish something. You have a goal, and it will tend to keep you out of trouble. There used to be another saying that "idle hands are the devil's workshop."

I do have one suggestion regarding this, and that is that you choose a lawful occupation you enjoy, rather than some other job simply because it pays better. The psychological lift that you get from doing something that you do well is worth more bucks than you can even begin to imagine. There may be nothing worse than a boring job. Believe me, that does not create stability. You want to be happy in what you do, and you want that work to be in line with your gifts, and that will make you happy.

**Choice number 6:** You need to choose the right relationship with the opposite sex.

Let us go to I Corinthians 13 and we will finish on this.

**I Corinthians 13:11** When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man I put away childish things.

Many of you are in a transition stage of life. It is a passage between childhood and adulthood, and it is a difficult period because you are not quite either. It is more difficult now I think than it has ever been, or maybe used to be, or whatever, because of the technology and the times which are making more and more options available for us.

These characteristics that we can see within this book of children are really not just the signs of youth, but signs of immaturity at any age. However, young people, you must be aware that this world is constantly pressuring you

to convince you to believe that you are more mature than you actually are. The number one and two causes of death of teens are accidents and suicide. This shows me that mentally, emotionally, and morally, teens are unable to handle the pressures of adulthood and they crash, either literally or psychologically, and they die before actually reaching adulthood.

That is what I am hoping to help you avoid, because I want you to choose life, and life is in God's way. You have the power to set your destiny—a power that is so strong and backed by God's own Word that even Satan cannot snatch it out of your hands unless you give it to him. So make up your mind to deliberately choose life.