

The Power of Choice



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:1–13; Deut. 30:10–19; Ps. 119:11; Col. 3:2; Heb. 11:8–10.*

Memory Text: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank” (*Daniel 1:8*).

Jackie and Carol (not their real names) were sisters, separated by two years, who grew up together in a loving home. By the time she reached adolescence, Jackie was applying herself diligently to her studies. She did well and, after graduating from high school, went to university to study business. Today, she has a position with an investment company, is married, and lives in her own home.

Carol chose to party and enjoy herself. She dropped out of high school and began to experiment with tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Today she is a single mother, living on government assistance, in rehabilitation for her drug dependency, and remains slightly jealous—though grudgingly proud—of her sister’s success.

Both girls had the same opportunities, chances, and set of choices. Each is living with the consequences of those choices.

Choices—we all have them, we all have to make them, and we all have to live with the consequences of the ones we make.

Hence, the important question for us all is, What will those choices be, and how can we know how to make the right ones? This week we will look a little more at the power of choice.

The Week at a Glance: God gave humans the power of choice. With those choices, however, come consequences.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 10.*

The Reality of Freedom

We often hear people talk about *freedom*. Political movements usually, in one way or another, make great proclamations about *freedom*. One state in the United States boasts the motto “Live free or die.”

Freedom is, in fact, a very complicated subject. The word means different things to different people in different contexts. It’s not always easy to pin down exactly what people mean when they talk about “freedom.”

One thing, though, is certain: when God created humans, He made them moral beings, and in order for humans to be truly moral, they had to have moral freedom. In other words, they had to have the capacity to choose wrongly, if they wanted to. If not—if they didn’t have that option—they really couldn’t be free.

Read Genesis 2:16, 17. What is implied in God’s words to Adam? How is Adam’s moral freedom revealed in these texts?

In Genesis 3:1–6, we see the moral freedom given to both Adam and Eve. Why would God have warned them against eating of the tree unless they had been given the power of choice? Hence, we see perfect beings in a perfect environment allowed moral freedom. At the very foundation of human existence, the reality of our freedom has been made readily apparent.

Read Genesis 3:1–6. What are the places where Adam and Eve both exercised free will? How could they at each of these stages have made better choices? What can we learn from these texts about the kind of choices we make?

Human moral freedom must be something very important in the eyes of God. After all, look at what our abuse of that freedom cost Him. So sacred, so fundamental, is this gift that, rather than deny it to us, God would go to the cross instead of leaving us to our demise because of how we misused this gift.

What basic mistake did both Adam and Eve make? How can we, with the knowledge of their mistakes, avoid doing similar things in our own context? In what ways do we face similar temptations?

The Consequences: Guilt and Fear

Read Genesis 3:7–13 and answer the following questions:

1. If you could define, in one word, what the couple experienced, what would that word be, and why? How do we, in our own experience today, sometimes face the same thing?

2. What other emotion did they experience that they had not known before? Again, in what ways do we experience the same thing, and why?

When the Watergate scandal in the United States was exposed by the press in the early 1970s, it was revealed that much of the White House activity focused on cover-up operations. When President Richard Nixon finally resigned, it was not because he either had authorized the break-in to the Democratic Party's premises or had a part in planning the break-in; instead, he was guilty of trying to cover up what others had done.

In a sense, what we see in these verses is Adam and Eve attempting a cover-up job, trying to hide from God what they had done or at least trying to shift the blame from themselves.

Of course, most folk who know the Lord know that it's impossible to hide anything from Him. When the hairs of our heads are numbered (*Matt. 10:30*), we can't fool Him about our actions. But we can fool ourselves, can't we? How easily we find ways to try to shift the blame on others. *If only my boss hadn't done this, then I wouldn't have done that. If only my spouse hadn't done this, then I wouldn't have done that. If only God had taken away the temptation when I prayed, then I wouldn't have fallen. If only this, if only that . . .*

Sure, we sometimes face powerful temptations, temptations that pull at the very fabric of our being. The situation is worse, too, because we already come with corrupted and fallen natures, which makes it that much easier for us to succumb when tempted and tried. As bad as sin is, as bad as the consequences often are, we make it worse when we refuse to accept responsibility. After all, how can we overcome sin if, in our own minds, we don't blame ourselves for it?

How open are you to accepting responsibility for your wrong choices? Or do you always find ways to blame others for them? If so, when are you going to stop?

Choices: Good and Bad

However much human nature changed after the fall of Adam and Eve, as humans we still have the power of choice. We still have free will. What we do with that free will is, really, entirely up to us. We can surrender to God and obey Him, or we can choose to go our own sinful way.

Read Hebrews 11:8–10. What does this tell us about Abraham and his choices? What can we learn from those choices?

What were, however, some of the wrong choices that Abraham made? What were the consequences of those choices? See *Genesis 16, 21:9–14*.

“Polygamy had become so widespread that it had ceased to be regarded as a sin, but it was no less a violation of the law of God, and was fatal to the sacredness and peace of the family relation. Abraham’s marriage with Hagar resulted in evil, not only to his own household, but to future generations.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 145.

Read Daniel 1:8–16. The words “Daniel purposed in his heart” indicate that Daniel’s choice was both conscious and firm. The consequences of this deliberate and reasoned decision influenced the whole life of Daniel and occasioned his special blessing and attention by the Lord. Daniel reaffirmed his commitment to the Lord daily in his seasons of prayer and devotion.

It is one thing to say that we should make right choices; it is another to have the conviction of heart to do it. What are ways that we can program our minds so that we are more likely to make the right choices? *Ps. 119:11, Phil. 4:8, Col. 3:2*.

In the end, we are free to choose for the Lord or free to choose against Him. There is no middle ground. We are on one side or the other. This doesn’t mean that we don’t make mistakes or fall (look at Abraham, for instance); it means, instead, that we must “purpose in our hearts” to seek to do God’s will, whatever the cost. We must “purpose in our hearts” to choose what is right, and what is right is what God commands us to do. What is important, one thing that we should never forget, is that if we fall, if we make the wrong choices, God does not cast us off. The danger, instead, is that we can feel so guilty, we can feel so bad, that we are in danger of giving up. In such cases, our only hope is to cast ourselves at the foot of the cross and claim the forgiveness offered in Jesus.

Choice and the Next Generation

Read Deuteronomy 30:10–19. What is the essence of the Lord’s words to His people? What points jump out at you? More important, how do you understand the idea that their choices will impact the lives of their seed, their children? What does that mean? How can our choices impact our children?

The consequences of life choices affect not just ourselves but often our children, as well. Our influence is so much greater than we imagine, especially on our children.

One example is that of drinking alcohol. A whole lot of hoopla has been made of the supposed *benefit* of one glass of alcohol per day. This promotion, empowered by liquor industry lucre, has fooled many. Few people, though, are aware that these studies are seriously flawed and when corrections for these flaws have been applied, it is found that these touted benefits are nonexistent.

Alcohol remains what it always has been, one of the great scourges of humanity; and with all the warnings we have been given about it, how foolish to let our guard down now.

It is known that about 7 percent of persons who take a first drink will become alcoholic or problem drinkers. The choice to introduce alcohol into our homes, even just a little here and there, may or may not have repercussions on us individually. We may not be damaged greatly by it. But what of our children? What about the example you leave? If you drink, it’s much more likely your children will, as well. Is it worth choosing something that may steal the life of your child? Studies clearly have shown that children raised in homes where alcohol is present are much more at risk of alcohol problems than are children raised in homes where alcohol is not consumed. That simple fact alone should make us even more cautious about the examples we set.

Read again Deuteronomy 30:10–19. Your choices impact not just yourself but your children, too. And if you don’t have children, why risk making a choice that, in the end, presents so many hazards? God gave us these health principles for our good. Do we have the faith to trust Him at His word?

Who has not seen examples of the devastation brought by alcohol use? Why be foolish and risk that for yourself or, even worse, why do something that influences others in the wrong direction?

Choice and Chance

“And of Zion it will be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her.’ The Lord will record, when He registers the peoples: ‘This one was born there.’ Selah.” (*Ps. 87:5, 6, NKJV*).

Though all have the power of choice, not all have an equal array of opportunities. Some choices limit future possibilities and opportunities. Some individuals suffer disadvantages without the choice being theirs. Consider the disadvantages that cloud the lives of some: children born into homes where drugs are used, where domestic violence prevails, where poverty is extreme. Consider the ravages of violent corruption and desperation. We all, to one degree or another, have been placed in situations that are not of our own choosing.

Read Psalm 87:5, 6. What is the message there for all of us regarding some of the circumstances that are not of our own choosing? How, too, should these verses help us better understand the meaning of Matthew 7:1, 2?

God knows our circumstances; God knows that many of us have been brought into horrible situations not of our own doing. God alone fully knows the background of us all.

Who hasn't, at times, met people struggling with some terrible issues, issues brought about by choices that others made: a choice of a parent to abandon the family; a choice of a spouse to commit adultery; a choice of a friend to betray someone who had trusted him or her? The variables are as endless as they are scary.

Yet, the good news in all this is that we can make one choice that is the most important of all. We can choose to follow Jesus. As we choose Jesus as our personal Savior, as we repent from our sinful ways, and as we are baptized, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through this gift, God now enters and influences our hearts and minds to direct our actions and to lead us to bear fruit. We become branches of the True Vine.

According to Galatians 5:22, 23, the fruit of the Spirit does not come individually but as a cluster. It is the result of the Spirit taking control of our will, at least to the degree that we choose to let Him. In other words, through the power of God working in our lives, we can—by our choices—allow the Lord to negate some of the negative things brought upon us by choices we ourselves never made.

What are some of the things you have struggled with that are the result of choices that others, not you, have made? What better choices can you yourself make that could help in the healing process?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Good Angels More Powerful Than Evil Angels,” p. 96, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“Every soul has a heaven to win, and a hell to shun. And the angelic agencies are all ready to come to the help of the tried and tempted soul. He, the Son of the infinite God, endured the test and trial in our behalf. The cross of Calvary stands vividly before every soul. When the cases of all are judged, and they [the lost] are delivered to suffer for their contempt for God and their disregard of His honor in their disobedience, not one will have an excuse, not one will need to have perished. It was left to their own choice who should be their prince, Christ or Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 96.

“God does not compel men to give up their unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which they will accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 458.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, discuss the whole question of *freedom*. What does freedom mean? Is someone who chooses to be a slave really free? How free are we, really? What are the limits of freedom? When can freedom be a bad thing?
- 2 Think about all the negative effects of alcohol. Think of the lives ruined through its use. When contrasted with the supposed *benefits*, why is it smart never to get involved with it at all?
- 3 Some folk have been born into loving, Christian homes with parents who loved them, cared for them, and taught them about Jesus and His grace. Others have been born into homes where the parents abused them and neglected them, and even if they did talk about Jesus, they certainly didn’t reflect Christ in their lives. Their actions revealed them to be agents of Satan, not of Christ. What hope does the gospel hold out to these people? What promises can you point them to?
- 4 There’s no question, some folk have been born in horrible circumstances with consequences that, to one degree or another, will haunt them for the rest of their lives. At the same time, why must we be careful not to spend the rest of our lives blaming our parents, or our poor upbringing, for our problems? How can we learn to, through God’s grace, move beyond these things?

Long-Distance Faith

Silas Motea is a lay Bible worker who lives in Johannesburg, South Africa. He studied the Bible with a young couple who were baptized.

Then Stella, the young wife, lost her job. For months she searched for work and sometimes wondered why God was allowing this trial. At last she found a new job in her field of expertise. She shared her faith with her new coworkers, and that's when she met Mpho, a woman who wanted to know more about the Bible. The two women began studying the Bible together. Mpho found the Bible studies so compelling that she stopped in the middle of one Bible study and called her mother long distance to share what she was learning.

Mpho's mother, Siongile, was excited too and wanted to know more. But she lived 250 miles (400 kilometers) away. Stella didn't know anyone who lived near Siongile, so Mpho arranged to call her mother every day so she could join the Bible studies over the telephone. Stella, Mpho, and Siongile studied together, long distance, almost every day.

Siongile was excited about what she was learning and wanted someone to visit her. Stella didn't know anyone who lived in Siongile's area, so she asked Motea and his wife, who lived much closer to Siongile, to visit. They were happy to go.

When the couple arrived at Siongile's home, they found that the woman had invited several neighbors to join her for the Bible study. During the Bible study Motea learned that Siongile had been searching for God even before her daughter had called her. And when Siongile learned that her daughter was studying with Adventists, she asked an Adventist nurse to take her to church.

Siongile was so excited about what she was learning that Motea and his wife spent the entire day studying the Bible with her. They stayed overnight and continued their Bible studies the following day. In two days the trio had completed an entire series of Bible studies, and Siongile sighed, "Why did I have to wait so long to find this message? If I had learned this while I was still young, I could have raised my children in this faith and shared the good news with my friends!"

Siongile traveled 250 miles [400 kilometers] to tell her other children what she was learning. Both Siongile and Mpho have been baptized; and Siongile wants to become a literature evangelist so she can share her new faith with others.

Our mission offerings help provide materials to reach those who are searching.