

The Wise Thing – Part 1

CREDIT: “The Best Question Ever” by Andy Stanley

Normally, sermons attempt to provide people with answers – but today, I want to leave you with a question:

- It is a question that I cannot answer for you.
- It is a question that applies to every decision you ever make for the rest of your life.
- It is a question that in many cases would be very difficult for me to answer, but will be fairly easy for you to answer – in fact, in most cases you will know the answer immediately.
- While it is easy to answer, it can be a bit threatening to ask.
- It is a question that pierces the fog of self-deception that many people allow themselves to live in – it exposes our motives.
- It is a question that sheds light on issues the Bible doesn't specifically address.
- Most important, if you had asked this one question and acted on your conclusion, you could have avoided your greatest regret in life. (For some of you, it might have changed the direction of your life!)

Have you ever made a decision that you wish you could erase? Have you ever done anything really dumb? Is there anything in your life you wish you could forget? Is there anything you've done that you hope no one ever finds out about?

We should have known better. In fact, in some cases we did know better, but for some reason we thought we would be the one to beat the odds and be the exception to the rule. We believed that we could control the outcome of our decision. So we followed our hearts, trusted our emotions, did our own thing – and now we wonder what in the world we were thinking!

Some of the bad decisions you made led to chapters of your life you wish you could go back and unlive. Some of our bad decisions are simply embarrassing, but others scar us. Chances are you've already bumped into somebody on the verge of making the same dumb decision you made and you've warned them. What do they do when you tell them? They continue full speed into that oncoming train!

You ask yourself, “Could I possibly have been that naïve, stubborn and foolish?” YES! The problem is that, while nobody plans to mess up their life, few of us plan NOT to! We don't put the necessary safeguards in place – and that robs us of our potential and our future.

But there is a question that can FOOLPROOF your life if you will ask it!

The question is easy to answer, but difficult to ask. Why? Because we are so good at deceiving ourselves when we want something. Some of us are very talented at making a bad decision sound like a great decision, a poor financial choice sound like an investment opportunity, or a poor relationship decision sound like a ministry opportunity!

- This won't hurt anybody.
- I'll only do it once.
- I haven't had any for a week.
- I'll be careful.
- I can handle it.
- I can quit whenever I want to.
- Everybody needs to live a little.

Some of your greatest regrets started with choices that you convinced yourself were good ones. But you were actually robbing yourself – because they ended up costing you dearly in your relationships, finances or spiritual life.

The strange thing is that most of the time we are fully aware of the game we are playing! The fact that we have to give ourselves a reason, make up an excuse, defend our decision, or go through a series of mental gymnastics to rationalize it ought to tip us off immediately! (i.e. eating vegetables, saving money, exercising)

You don't sit around looking for reasons to do the right thing – it's the bad decisions that require creative reasoning! And this human habit of self-deception is what makes this question so uncomfortable to ask!

- It exposes the irrationality of our excuses.
- It reveals the true intent of our heart.
- It penetrates the walls of rationalization we are hiding behind.
- It dismantles the arguments we use to keep truth at arm's length.

You will really like this question if you really want to do what's right. But it will be a nuisance if, instead of trying to make a right decision, what you are actually doing is trying to “make a decision right.”

Pay very close attention to your emotional response to this question today – it will either illuminate or irritate. If your reaction is defensive, that alone will tell you a great deal about yourself and the decision you are making. It is one lesson you cannot afford to miss!

The first three chapters of Ephesians expound the benefits of being in Christ, then chapter four turns a corner:

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

Paul says, “Don’t live the way you used to live, because you are not the person you used to be!” And he launches into one of the most practical sections in the Bible, even suggesting that we become imitators of God in our everyday lives. It’s a little bit overwhelming! Paul’s standards are certainly worth striving for, but just about everything he says runs directly against the “cultural current.” And if no one else is making me do it, I don’t know if I’m that good, consistent or disciplined to do all of this!

Paul knows our frustration, so in his list of “WHAT TO DO” he includes instructions on “HOW TO DO IT.” He unveils an approach to life that will set us up for success if we will just honestly answer one question.

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, [16] Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. [17] Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

THEREFORE (ask “what’s it there for?”) – it connects all the stuff Paul is telling us to do with his explanation of how to do it.

- Walk circumspectly – don’t be careless or casual in following Christ, watch your step because it is so easy to stumble, be intentional
- Not as fools but as wise – this is the yardstick we are to use to assess every decision we make, and it leads us to the one question that enables us to consistently apply the commands of the Bible:
- WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO?

Usually when we are making our choices we run our options and opportunities through a different filter – IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH IT? The assumption is that if there is nothing wrong, illegal, unethical or immoral about it, then it qualifies as an option for us. If there is no “THOU SHALT NOT,” we assume that God is saying “THOU SHALT IF THOU PLEASE.”

Unfortunately, this kind of thinking sets us up for the real question behind too many of our choices: “How close can I get to the line between right and wrong without actually doing something wrong?” How close can I get to sin without actually sinning? If it’s not technically “wrong” then it must be “right” – right?

But it doesn’t stop there! We soon end up asking: “How far over the line between right and wrong can I go without experiencing consequences?” And eventually we will be asking “How did I ever get myself into this mess!?”

Every bad decision you have ever heard about could have been avoided if only someone asked, WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO?

God is our Father, and so He wants what is best for each of us. He has given us a standard that goes beyond cultural norms. He has given us a question that enables us to live an abundant life – not “barely get by” or “full of regret” but “abundant!”

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

The question God gave us in His word is not “Is there anything wrong with it?” but “What is the wise thing to do?” You can avoid the mistakes of the past and live “regret-free” in the future by making it your habit to ask this question.

Stop using “How close can I get to sin without sinning?” as your standard! God never intended for us to live life at the level of what’s permissible, legal, acceptable or not prosecutable! He wants us to analyze every opportunity through the lens of WISDOM.

Ephesians 5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Ephesus did not have a morally neutral climate – and neither do we! If we walk carelessly or casually, we will be swept right back into the mess we have been redeemed from – and we won’t even realize it!

Every day, we interface with a culture that encourages us in the most provocative ways to do everything in our power to try and satisfy appetites that can never be fully and finally satisfied. You don’t have to go looking for trouble – trouble is on every street corner, magazine, billboard, television and computer!

If you don’t pay attention, you will end up paying a price for your carelessness. If you aren’t intentional about living for God, you may unintentionally end up ensnared by sin. If you don’t filter your choices through God’s question, you will find yourself facing consequences that could have been avoided.

Ephesians 5:17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

How can a human being really “understand” God’s will? By facing up to what we already know in our hearts that God would have us do! Quit pretending, quit rationalizing, quit playing games!