



Good Morning, Church Family!

Today we are going to begin our ***Choose Wisely Sermon Series*** but before we dive into that.

By a show of hands...How many of you ***love*** making choices? Conversely, how many of you ***dread*** making choices? Sometimes we love to make choices, so we get to be the hero...and on the other hand we don't want to make choices because we fear being the villain if we get it wrong.

Illus:

You know there is a great story I heard about CEO who moved to a new company. Before settling into his new role, first he meets with the outgoing CEO, and the outgoing CEO says to him, "Sometimes you'll make wrong choices. You will. You'll mess up. When that happens, I've done you a favor, I have prepared three envelopes for you and I've left them in the top drawer of your desk."



The first time you make a bad choice, open envelope #1. The second time you make a bad decision, open envelope #2. The third time, open envelope #3."

For the first few months, everything goes fine. Then the CEO makes his first mistake, he goes to the drawer, opens up envelope #1, and the message from his predecessor reads, "Blame me." So he does: he calls in his leadership staff and says, "This is the old CEO's fault. He made these mistakes. I inherited these problems." And everybody says, "Okay, that makes sense." It works out pretty well.

Things go fine for a while, and then he makes his second mistake, another bad decision. So, he goes to the drawer and opens up envelope #2. This time the message reads, "Blame the board." And he does, he calls everyone in for a meeting and says, "It's the board's fault. This board has been a mess. I inherited them. They're the problem." And everybody says, "Okay, we get it, that makes sense."



Things go fine for a little while longer, and then he makes another bad choice. So, he goes to the drawer and opens up envelope #3. And the message reads: "Prepare three envelopes."

This CEO's bad choices cost him his job, he tried to play the blame game until he was found out. Church family our choices collectively over the course of our lives impact something far more important than our employment...our choices impact our soul.

Who you marry...Who you associate with...Who you go into business with...Where you decide to go to college...Where you decide to raise your family...What church you decide to attend...How seriously you take your relationship with Jesus. These are just some of the choices that will stack up on top of each other over the course of one's life. These choices forming the person you are.



CHOOSE WISELY is a study of the Kings of Israel and Judah; to **learn from their choices**, both wise and foolish. Because you see the Book of Kings is in part a **character study**...where we see these Kings placed in difficult situations again and again. Sometimes they choose wisely, but often their choices lack wisdom.

On the weeks we are examining a wise King....the graphic will be blue....on the weeks we are examining a King who lacked wisdom the graphic will be red.

And here is the point. God's word is given to us so that we might know the TRUTH. The TRUTH about how to live.

I think many of us are here this morning because we know we need THIS COMMUNITY (THE CHURCH) in order to live in that truth.



Now, the Kings we are going to focus on in this series don't have the same exact story as you. They are Royalty, they lived thousands of years ago, they lived in a context that is vastly different.

But we **DO** share a distinctive that connects us across culture and millennia...**we all fall short of the glory of God** (Romans 3:23). We are connected by our sin nature and our propensity to **CHOOSE WHAT IS FOOLISH OVER WHAT IS WISE.**

The hope of this **CHOOSE WISELY** sermon series is that we will take a fresh look at how we make choices; what we prioritize; where our truest devotion lies.

Pray:



SOLOMON THE FAITHFUL KING

Please turn in your Bibles/Mobile Apps to I Kings Chapter 3...

It is fitting that we begin this series with the wisest King who ever lived King Solomon.

King Solomon became King of Israel after his Father David. Solomon wasn't a perfect King (*more on that next week*) but he was a good King, and a lot of that was due to his wisdom.

And scripture makes it very clear that the genesis of Solomon's wisdom comes from a conversation that he had with God during a dream.

In the dream God tells Solomon, "Ask, What should I give you?" God offers Solomon a blank check...and Solomon responds, in I Kings 3:7-9

1 Kings 3:7-9 NIV

⁷ “Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties.⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number.

Read: 

1 Kings 3:7-9 NIV

9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

Continue Reading: 

Solomon does something so wonderful here...he is a person in leadership, with immense power, who admits that he doesn't know what he is doing.

Jewish tradition holds that Solomon was somewhere between the ages of 20-22, and here he acknowledges that compared to the task at hand he is just a little child.

And because Solomon knows his place, because he has the self awareness to know he needs to be humble, he asks for a **DISCERNING HEART** so he can govern well.

And if you know anything about our God, you know He **LOVED** this response from Solomon.

1 Kings 3:7-9 NIV

9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

A Discerning Heart refers to the ability to perceive and understand deeply, to make wise choices, and to exercise sound judgment.

You see King Solomon desired (above any request) the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, to understand the complexities of ruling a nation. And perhaps the most important part he wasn't embarrassed or ashamed to admit his shortcoming.

How often is it that we have a hard time admitting we don't know something?

How often is it that we try to fake it till we make it?

How often do we rush in without discernment often with disastrous results.



Illus:

Probably everyone here knows about the tragic events that played out a few weeks ago with the submarine explosion.

For those of you who don't watch any news. There was a submarine tourist expedition (Ocean Gate Titan) to visit the wreckage of the Titanic, and during the voyage the submarine experienced a catastrophic explosion killing everyone onboard.

As tragic as this was, what's perhaps even more tragic is that it was all preventable. Multiple safety warnings were ignored, the submarine wasn't certified, it was made up of the wrong materials, it didn't have sufficient strength to maintain the depths it was trying to reach, and the list goes on. With all these warnings (most of which the passengers were unaware of) the owners/operators of Ocean Gate Titan continued on.



SOLOMON THE FAITHFUL KING

And the reason why I bring this up, is because we can often operate as though we have it all together, like we have the answers, when often we are the ones ready to implode (*there are warning signs all around*) and we don't even acknowledge them.

Solomon knows he is inadequate, and so when the Lord comes to Him, he doesn't ask for more gold, he doesn't ask for more chariots or fighting men, he doesn't ask for anything for himself. Instead, he **chooses** to ask for something that will bless his people and glorify his God.

Wisdom is found in the choice to bring our inadequacy to God.

And this bring us to our first truth for this morning... ***Wisdom is found in the choice to bring our inadequacy to God.***

Solomon chose to bring his inadequacy about his leadership to God...and what did God do? He supplied Solomon's need?

And friends I think that same thing applies for us today. Because if we are honest we all have things in our lives that could explode on us at any moment.

A deep need we have, a resentment we are holding onto, a longing that is unfulfilled, a hurt we can't shake, a _____

Wisdom is found in the choice to bring our inadequacy to God. Where are you lacking? What can God supply you today?



But you see Church it wasn't just the decision to ask God for a discerning heart that made Solomon a Faithful King. Perhaps the most notable achievement in his reign was his desire/choice to build God's temple.

If you know anything about Old Testament history one of its biggest themes involves finding a place for God to dwell amongst His people on the earth.

Jerusalem was the location God chose for his dwelling to be built, and it was King David who desired to build this dwelling for the Lord, but God chose Solomon for this task.

Turn with me to I Kings chapter 5 starting in verse 3.

Here we are going to read Solomon's words about his thought process as he was set to begin the construction of the Temple of the Lord.

I Kings 5:3-5 NIV

³ “You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple for the Name of the Lord his God until the Lord put his enemies under his feet. ⁴ But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster.

Read: 

I Kings 5:3-5 NIV

⁵ I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God, as the Lord told my father David, when he said, ‘Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name.’

Continue Reading: 

There are a couple of things we glean from Solomon’s words here. First is that David was too overburdened to do an adequate job building the temple. If David had attempted to build, it would have likely been a sub par effort, not because he lacked passion but because of his many other commitments.

By comparison Solomon is living in a time of peace, he has made many diplomatic treaties, he has the favor of his neighbors, he has the adequate time and energy to put the temple construction front and center.

Given the biblical timeline, it took 7 years to complete the temple. This includes the time to gather materials, the actual construction itself, along with the decorations of fine cedar, gold and precious stones.

I Kings 5:3-5 NIV

⁵ I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God, as the Lord told my father David, when he said, ‘Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name.’

One of the things to take note of here is that God is patient.

God would rather have work done in his name that is planned and executed well...rather than something that is rushed and ill prepared.

God operates in excellence and he calls his people to pursue excellence at all times, but especially when our efforts are in His name.

Another thing to take note of here is that Solomon doesn't take the fact that he is living in peace time to rest on his laurels. Solomon could have chosen to take it easy, he could have said, "Man, a 7 year construction project?!? I'd rather take my Yacht out on the Mediterranean and chill!"

Solomon has the wisdom to know that peace time will not always be a present reality for the nation and so he has the vision to strike while the iron is hot.

Wisdom is found in the choice not to grow comfortable, but to press onward into God's purposes.

And this bring us to our second truth for this morning... ***Wisdom is found in the choice to not grow comfortable, but to press onward into God's purposes.***

One of the most important values in American culture is comfort isn't it? Americans expect to be comfortable. From the time that we're born in the hospital and wrapped in blankets, and placed on a soft mattress in a climate-controlled room, we expect to be comfortable.

We go to sleep in our SelectComfort beds, and we wake up under a blanket called a comforter. We sit in furniture crafted for our comfort, and we eat "comfort foods."

We drive cars that keep us from the discomfort of having to walk or ride a bike. And to top it off we don't really value our comfort because we take it for granted.

Wisdom is found in the choice not to grow comfortable, but to press onward into God's purposes.

Now don't get me wrong there is nothing wrong with physical comfort in and of itself...**however** it must be recognized that in a culture which emphasizes comfort it can often be hard to **choose** to be uncomfortable for the cause of Christ.

Remember it was Jesus who said to his disciples in Luke chapter 9, "If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.**"

Jesus is alerting us to the idea that the Christian life is not based on comfort as this world would have us pursue...rather the Christian life is rooted in the denial of what we may want in the moment for the future greater good.

Illus: As many of you know I was able to go on the 7th grade mission trip to Rhode Island a week ago. And I have literally been on dozens of mission trips over the years.



I have served at many rescue missions across the country and in Canada. But none of that prepared me for what we encountered at the Providence Rescue Mission.

When we arrived at the Providence rescue mission one the gentlemen that worked there [*he*] led us to this room [*the soda room*] and asked us if we could organize it.

This room was roughly 20 by 10 ft filled filled with soda cans, many of them leaking & expired, the floor was sticky, a horde of gnats, along with many rodents, I didn't know that rodents liked soda, but they must because they were living in the soda room. Not to mention the smell, its hard to describe the smell, let's just say it was so strong it overcame the body odor of the Jr. High students 😊.

I was so proud of our students, not one of them complained about the present discomfort of cleaning up this room.



These students learned a valuable lesson, a part of what it means to be a resilient disciple of Jesus.....They **chose** to think about the **future**, the future good God was inviting them into, **not** their immediate discomfort.

Friends isn't this the choice that is before us almost everyday. The choice to either focus on short term comforts or the choice to prioritize long term gains.

How might our diets be different if we could choose to look past present pleasure...for long term health.

How might our financial savings/investments benefit by choosing to looking past the short term impulse buy...for the long term financial plan.

How might our marriages benefit by choosing to endure the discomfort of a conversation we don't want to have, or being the first to apologize...because we aren't focused on the present pain, but the future promise.




Moving on in our text... Solomon has a vision of how this Temple will be a future blessing.

We see in chapter 7 Solomon completes the Temple and in chapter 8 he offers an amazing prayer to God in which he spreads out his arms towards heaven in front of the altar, with all of the Israelites present.

We do not have time to examine this entire prayer this morning, but in this prayer Solomon speaks of God's Faithfulness, he acknowledges God's Omnipresence, he prays for God's presence to continue, he prays for Divine Guidance, he prays for Forgiveness and Mercy, he prays for God's power to be among them.

I Kings 8:60, 61 CSB

⁶⁰ May all the peoples of the earth know that the Lord is God. There is no other! ⁶¹ Be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord our God to walk in his statutes and to keep his commands, as it is today.”

And then after the prayer he turns his attention to the people and says this... **Read:** 

It is clear that a part of the temple's purpose was so that the people, the Nations of the earth would know that the Lord is God and there is no other!

Solomon's 7 year construction project had this in view...the temple wasn't just a dwelling, it wasn't just a place of worship...it was a symbol of something greater, something singular, unlike anything else, ever.

You see friends what both David and Solomon understood was this.. that ***God Is Like No Other***...Solomon's Faithfulness to God is built on this understanding.

Therefore his admonition to the people here is... ***BE WHOLEHEARTED TOWARDS GOD.***

I Kings 8:60, 61 CSB

⁶⁰ May all the peoples of the earth know that the Lord is God. There is no other! ⁶¹ Be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord our God to walk in his statutes and to keep his commands, as it is today.”

The word Solomon uses here in this passage for wholehearted devotion is the Hebrew word shalem.

The etymology of the Hebrew word shalēm is related to the concept of completeness, wholeness, or integrity. It carries the idea of being whole or sound in every aspect, indicating sincerity, and undivided loyalty.

How do we know if we are being whole hearted from the context of I Kings chapter 8? If we are keeping God's statutes and commands. In other words obedience is a great measure of our heart's devotion.

And so I hope you see what Solomon is saying in these two verses...they have taken 7 years of sweat, blood and treasure to erect a monument to their God. This is to be a sign to the nations that the Lord is God and there is NO OTHER. And the people are to LIVE LIVES that ECHO this same message.

Wisdom is found in the choice to grow our heart's devotion towards God.

And that brings us to our third truth for this morning... **Wisdom is found in the choice to grow your heart's devotion towards God.**

Right now each of our hearts are growing in a particular direction. This is happening all the time, perhaps we aren't even aware of it.

How many people in here welcomed a new child/grandchild this year? **Your heart GREW in 2023 amen?**

How many people got married or you gained a new child through marriage this year? **Your heart GREW in 2023 amen?**

Is there anyone here who had the opportunity to develop a new relationship/friendship this year? **Your heart GREW, amen?**

Wisdom is found in the choice to grow our heart's devotion towards God.

Many of us know what it's like to easily make new connections and it's like our heart expands to accommodate.

It's not like once you have your 7th grandchild your like, sorry kid you're on your own 😊...no your heart expands to accommodate and for most of us that's not hard.

But church have you thought about being intentional about GROWING YOUR HEART'S DEVOTION TOWARDS GOD? And some may think...ok well how do I do that?

Church family, while God isn't a flesh and blood human being...God is a person, with a mind, emotions and a will, we are made in his image we get our personhood from him...which means we can talk to him, he will listen, we can learn his statues [*what's important to him*], we can follow his commands and intentionally live them out.

Wisdom is found in the choice to grow our heart's devotion towards God.

This really isn't significantly different from other relationships we have.

Some people say, yeah right, God doesn't speak to me!

[Holding the Bible Up] YES HE DOES! But many do not know the Word of God, so to them yes he is virtually silent.

You see we grow our heart's devotion toward God as we dive into relationship with Him.

I'm going to tell it to you straight...if you do not feel God's presence in your life, you might want to consider whether or not you have been intentional to grow your heart towards Him.



Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV): *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."*

But notice, we have to ask, we have to knock.

If we choose not to ask, if we are uninterested in knocking we cannot be surprised if doors do not open.



Illus:
Speaking of choices I cant help but share a powerful testimony I heard last week from Pastor Luis Cardona from the Providence Rescue Mission.

Here is Pastor Luis praying with our students as we were ending our time at the mission.
Luis came to America from Guatemala, he left his girlfriend behind so that he could get settled in America and then send for her.

Guatemala was and is a troubled place, and he found out once he arrived in America that his girlfriend he left behind had been murdered. Her family blamed Luis, saying that if he hadn't run off trying to fulfill his American Dream, their daughter would still be alive.

Luis blamed himself also, and this sent him down a spiral of alcohol and drug addiction.



Luis was living on the streets of Rhode Island when he says an African American gentlemen approached him, and told him, “God is going to use you, God has a plan for your life, God is going to be glorified though you!”

Luis said he told the man he was useless to God, but the man convinced him to stay the night at the Providence Rescue Mission. There Luis heard the gospel and made the decision to surrender his life to Jesus.

He graduated from the recovery program, started working for the mission, and even married the Executive Director’s daughter.

Pastor Luis shared that when they were pregnant with their second child, his wife was having complications. She began to bleed and they knew something was terribly wrong. They were certain she had miscarried because there was no movement in her womb for quite some time.



In this midst of this terrible tragedy Luis turned his rage and anger toward God. He said to God, “I have done everything you have asked me.” I have given everything to follow you, and now you take my child.”

Luis said the Holy Spirit responded to him in that moment, and said, ***“You claim you believe in my power, you tell others of the wonderful thing I can do, and yet you have not chosen to ask me to save your child.”***

Upon hearing this clear message from the Holy Spirit, Luis begins to beg God for the life of his child, by this time they are walking into hospital, and his wife's testimony, is that as they were crying out to God, believing that he is the God of miracles, her once lifeless womb stirred up into what felt like a tornado within her. Not long after she delivered a perfect healthy child...praise God!

Luis and his wife believe that their **choice** to stop blaming God and to start asking him is what made the difference.



Church family what about your life, what about my life?

Pastor Luis was prompted by the Holy Spirit, he made the choice to seek God even in the midst of uncertainty, even when it felt like God had left him.

For some of us this is the critical moment where we make the unwise choice to try to do it on our own, or we seek out earthly wisdom that sounds good to our ears but is short sighted.

From the context of I Kings 2-8 [*Solomon's Life*] we have learned that wisdom is found in the choice to bring our inadequacy to God, to not grow comfortable but to press on into God's purposes for us, and to choose to grow our hearts devotion towards God.



Church family if we prioritize these things we will choose wisely and live the faithful lives that Jesus died to make possible. And that really is the point of all of this. We all have been given a gift, the cross is a gift to mankind.

Because of the cross you can choose to take your burdens and lay them down.

Because of the cross you can choose to take the shame of your past and cast it into the depth of the sea.

Because of the cross you can choose to forgive and break free of your anger.

Because of the cross you can choose to love the unlovable.

AMEN?!?!?



But most likely you will not be forced into this choice, this is an act of the will.

Jesus says in Matthew 16 verses 24-26 *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”*

This is the choice...Jesus makes it very clear.

On one hand the denial of oneself that opens the door to discipleship.

On the other hand we do it our way on our terms, but the price is high we forfeit our very soul.



There are some of us here this morning who have chosen to follow Jesus...we are solid and grown. **Keep choosing Jesus!** Continue to grow your heart towards him, expand your love for your savior.....and be a blessing to others as a result.

However there are others of us here who maybe have not chosen to follow Jesus quite yet. Perhaps you are still unsure about faith, and whether there really is something to all of this. **Friends this will be the defining decision of your life...**and my prayer for those who are still deciding what to do with Jesus in your life is that you will choose to seek Him out.

Psalm 34:8 says, *"Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."* May each one of us **choose** to seek him out today, for whatever we are needing today because He is real, He is here, and He is available.

Pray: