

HARD DECISIONS

Have you ever had to make a hard decision?

Of course we are faced with making easy decisions all of the time, every day. Am I going to wake up early and go to church? Am I going to do the speed limit? Do I want pizza or chicken for dinner?

But how about the really hard decisions? Luckily they don't come around too often – but when they do come around we have to confront them and make a choice that can really affect us – in either good ways or bad ways – those hard decisions typically change the rest of our lives.

Many of us had to face hard decisions like: which college should I go to? Should I get married to this person? Should I move to Arizona? Should we have kids? What do I want to be when I grow up? Am I ready to retire? Should I buy a new house?

Life changing decisions.

Earlier Jim read for us a little about Abraham who had to make some hard decisions – life changing decisions.

First of all, Abraham had to trust God – God told him that if he followed God and did what God said, then Abraham's descendants would number more than the stars. And to top it off, Abraham was already really old – and didn't have any kids.

And as the scripture read, "And Abraham believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Abraham made the hard decision and trusted God with his heart – and God knew that Abraham trusted him with his heart – and rewarded Abraham as he promised him he would.

Whenever I think of Abraham, and the way he trusted God with his heart – it makes me realize that we don't always trust God with our whole heart. Or sometimes we even question the existence of God.

For example -

When we are sick – or someone we love is sick.

When someone is dying.

During financial hardship.

When our life is falling apart,

Sometimes it is hard to trust God or to continue to believe in him with our full heart.

But during the hardest of the hard times, we usually still end up seeking him out – maybe we are a little unsure, but many times we still end up looking for him.

But how about when everything in our life is going perfectly?

For example –

Everyone is healthy in the family – and actually in better shape than they had been in years.

Just got a new job, or your retirement portfolio is up 20% over last year.

Just everything is humming along perfectly.

When everything is going well – sometimes we forget to thank God, or trust God to continue to be in our lives, or even believe that God had anything to do with our good fortune – but instead believe that it was our own works and turn our back on God.

For some of us – it is harder to remember God during those good times than it is to remember him during the hard times.

So yes, we face hard decisions in our lives. Some of them have to do with our faith as well.

Coming to faith and believing in God can be a hard decision for some, listening to God can be a hard decision, and deciding to continue to trust God can be a hard decision. But they are all life changing decisions.

Isn't that what God wants us to do – make those hard decisions and choose him and trust in him. Live our life in the way he wants us to live?

And that is what free will is about.

I have been asked several times why, if God really loves us – why is there sin in the world? Why did he even bother to give us a choice between good and evil?

Because God wants us to make a choice for him. If there wasn't sin, of course we would choose him. We wouldn't know any differently.

But he gave us free will so we could choose to accept him with our hearts – and our minds – and our souls.

Choosing the right path isn't always easy. But it is life changing.

Sometimes the right decision can be harder than we could even imagine.

Jim read for us where Jesus knew that he would die in Jerusalem. So Jesus knew that if he kept in his ministry, he would die. So it goes to reason that if he stopped his ministry, he would live.

What a hard choice – continue to do what you know is right – and die – or turn your back on what you know is right – and live.

But that was Jesus – of course he would do the right thing.

Have you ever asked yourself – what would you do in that same kind of situation? What if you knew for a fact that if you continued in your ministry, or even continued in your faith – that you would be put to death for those beliefs.

Here in the US we don't really have to worry about that do we? I mean, it is a free country – no need to worry about that.

But people today do need to worry about it in other places.

Take Abdul Rahman, for example.

Abdul was turned in by his own family members for being a Christian. In Afghanistan, where Abdul is from, there is only one religion allowed and that is Islam – the religion of the Muslims.

The penalty for rejecting Islam and becoming a Christian? Death.

Now he could have come out and said he wasn't a Christian, that he just made a mistake – but instead, he went on TV and admitted he was a Christian knowing it would probably mean death for him.

Because of international pressure, he wasn't put to death – just declared insane.

But have you ever wondered what you would say if faced with the same issue?

How strong is our faith? Is it strong enough to stand up and say, “Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ” even if it meant prison or death?

I believe in Jesus, - but to put my own life on the line – I don't know how I would respond. I would hope that my faith would hold up and I would be able to say with complete conviction, that I am a Christian – knowing that those words could mean my death.

We should ask ourselves that question – I mean, what would we do if the world events change and it became illegal to be a Christian here in the US?

Would we continue to trust God and his promises? Would we continue to say we are Christians?

The Bible tells us that people will be put to death for their belief in Christ. READ REVELATION 20:4b - The Bible even tells us we are blessed in heaven if we stand up for our beliefs in the face of persecution for our faith.

History has showed us that tens of thousands of Christians have already been put to death because of their faith.

What a hard choice.

I know for some of you here – it wouldn't be a hard choice. But everyone here is in a different place in their faith journey. Some of you might not fully understand who God is or even sure if you believe. Others have no doubt who God is and believe with your entire heart, mind and soul. And the rest fit somewhere between these two.

If you have a strong faith already – I invite you to continue to strengthen that faith during this Lenten Season. Try to focus on God a little more every day and work towards living the life God wants you to live – continue to follow the examples that Jesus gave us.

For those who aren't quite there yet in their faith journey, take this Lenten Season to try to work through your doubts. Talk to your friends, your spouse, or me to help you understand your faith a little more. Come to church every Sunday during this season and try to focus more and more on God and ask him to help you grow in your faith.

Then make the hard decisions:

Decide you want to get to know God in a new way.

Pray to God and invite him to come into your life.

Listen. Listen to the tugging at your heart –

Open your heart and allow God in.

Trust God to help you through life's struggles.

All of us might not get to the place in our faith journey where we love God so much we would give up our lives for him.

But we need to remember that Jesus loved us so much that he gave his life up for us. And what did he ask for us to do in return? Believe in Him.

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