

Series: Come and Follow
Title: Critical Choices
Text: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Colossians 3:1-7
Key Word: Choices
Proposition: Everyone will make life-giving choices.

Good morning everyone. My name is Chris Farmer. I thank God that I can serve as one of your pastors. We are thrilled that you have chosen to come and worship with us today. God is in this place. He is here to reveal His ways and purposes so that we can live the life God created us to live. He desires that we reach people far from God and develop radiant followers of Jesus Christ. As followers of Christ, we strive to love Him and others, to grow to be like Jesus and to serve the world.

In preparation for Easter, we are learning what Jesus meant by his call upon our lives to come and follow Him. Today, the Spirit of Christ calls us to make some critical choices.

On September 11, 2001, an airline jet barreled into the Pentagon. Officer Isaac Hoopii stood outside while it slammed into the building. Immediately he began helping people struggle out of the building—in some cases, carrying them out.

Hoopii wanted to do more. Wearing only his short-sleeved blue police uniform—no mask, no protective coat, not even a handkerchief—he ran into the dark, smoke-filled Pentagon. Someone yelled at him to stop. "We gotta get people," he shouted back. Suffocating on smoke, Hoopii heard the building cracking. He called out, "Is anybody in here? Anybody here?"

Wayne Sinclair and five coworkers were crawling through rubble and had lost all sense of direction when they heard Hoopii's voice. They cried out, and Hoopii responded. "Head toward my voice. Head toward my voice." Following his voice, Sinclair and the others soon made their way out of the crumbling building. In the midst of the rubble of life, Jesus offers us, His Church, life. He says, "Head toward my voice."

I am not a big Country music fan...but I do think that country music has the best song titles of any musical genre... Here are a few: "May The Bird Of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose"... "Thank God And Greyhound She's Gone "... "How Can I Miss You If You Won't Go Away?"..."She Done Tore My Heart And Stomped That Sucker Flat"... You just know that there is a story behind everyone of those song titles.

George Jones, a country music icon wrote the stereotypical country "cheat'n & drink'n" songs. On March 6, 1999, country music fans learned that Jones critically injured himself when he crashed his Lexus in Nashville. The investigation determined that he had been drinking and driving. Thankfully, he recovered, two months later his new album called "Cold Hard Truth" came out and on it was a hit song titled "Choices", and ironically, the hook line says, "I'm Living And Dying With The Choices I Made". Along with the ancient Hebrews, we live and die by our choices. Everyday, we have a choice to "Head toward His voice."

Life is tricky. Along the journey of life, we encounter the unexpected and the dangerous...the inhospitable and the confusing. We may have to climb mountains filled with unanticipated crevices and fissures. We may trek through beautiful or thorny valleys. This journey calls for critical choices that we live and die with.

God gives us the gift of choice. It is a wonderful gift. God gave it to Adam and Eve in the garden. It is intelligent, thoughtful choice--decision-making--that separates us from the rest of God's creation. However, the LORD God gave them this warning: *"You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."* (Genesis 2:16, 17) God gives us many good choices defined by clear boundaries with consequences and rewards for our choice. We live or die by the choices we make.

Before they made the big horrible choice, they made good use of their power to choose by putting this gift to work in a productive way. They named all the species of every living thing. They tilled the soil and harvested its fruit. As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we too have this ability to choose.

We make hundreds of them everyday. Some of our decisions are insignificant (Is it McDonalds, Subway, or Hickory River? is it paper or plastic?) Other choices greatly affect our lives. They determine its quality and quantity. Before the children of Israel went into the Promise Land, Moses delivered God's message about important choices: *"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice*

you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20a)

There are choices we make that literally choose life...choose closeness to God. Other choices bring destruction and decay. The choices we make impact the quality and meaning of our lives in this life and the next. What are a few huge choices?

“What kind of work will I do?” What are you going to do with your work life? We can also reframe this question by asking: How can God use your unique gifts and talents to make a difference in this world? This can mean a whole series of decisions including, "what school, college, university or training program is best." It is a HUGE choice. It could also mean decisions about serving our world to share His Word.

At one time, a person would chose a career and stay in that career until they retired. Today, though we see many people who get on a career path and then for various reasons change their vocation. Vocational transitions invite folks to explore God’s call upon their lives.

"Who am I going to marry?" This big-ticket decision affects life. Probably every married person in this room had wondered, "What if I had married someone else?" Go ahead, elbow your spouse in the ribs right now, and say, "I know what you’re thinking!" I will not ask if you are living or dying with that choice you made.

This is a huge choice. For a Christian it becomes even more important as God tells us that we need to marry someone who shares Christ in common with us and is

going the same direction. Then, you add the children that come to most marriages into the equation. This decision influences your whole family and even future generations.

Another major choice is "Where will I live?" The community you choose to live in can have enormous influence on your life. Factors like the schools, the politics, the churches and the climate all add up. Someday you ought to ask Pastor Bonita why she loves Fletcher, Ohio...

Lot, Abraham's nephew, had a big decision to make about where to live, where to settle down with his wife and daughters. He could choose the lush green plain with the notorious wicked and corrupt cities of Sodom & Gomorrah or the barren desert. Lot chose for himself lush plain of Jordan. He separated from his uncle and moved his family to Sodom to the ruin of his family. This big decision had significant consequences.

I also want to focus on this huge decision: What will you believe? What you believe will determine how you live your life. The clearer you are with your beliefs and your values the happier and the more effective you will be. Values are deeply held convictions, which guide behaviors and decisions. They define what is right, good and appropriate. Personal values are the components of a life of integrity. When we honor our values, we feel right, in-tune with and true to ourselves, with others and with God. Stress often results from being out of alignment with values. Examples of personal values might include integrity, generosity, diligence,

persistence, and humor. Like values, beliefs are deeply held truths about life. Beliefs are one's thoughts about some aspect of life, the way it is and the way it should be.

What do you believe? What do you value? They will determine your quality of life.

Here are a few choices that resolve the quality of our relationship with God and with others. **"Will I live a life of obedience or self-will?"** Every day every believer makes decision after decision regarding obedience to the Lord. Will we be ethical and honest at work when given a chance to cut a corner or get-away with something? Will we honor our spouse and keep our vows? Will I do life God's way or my way? Will I follow my fleshly nature or the Holy Spirit?

One of the most poignant moments of Jesus' earthly life must have been when He looked at some of His followers and said, *"So why do you call me 'Lord,' when you won't obey me?"* (Luke 6:46) To choose to live by self-will is a dangerous and damaging thing for the child of God. If you choose to be the sole navigator of your life, you will eventually end up in a ditch. We can either choose to bow our knee to Christ each day and crown Him the Lord of our lives or not.

"Will I commit to spiritual growth or spiritual apathy?" I am convinced that spiritual transformation does not "just happen". God can always be counted on to do His gracious work in the believer's life, but God works in conjunction with our choices.

As we talk about growing to be like Jesus, I invite you to hear Peter's words:
"but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18)

God offers us some tools to keep our faith fresh and growing. We will not grow very much at all until we engage the Bible. We will not develop in our walk with Christ until we pray with passion. We will not become a radiant follower of Christ until we decide to invest our best resources (our time, talents and treasure) into His kingdom. We will not mature in our faith until we participate in some authentic, genuine, accountable relationships. I challenge you to grow to be like Jesus. Engage these tools, which are thousands of years old and you will grow to be like Jesus. Otherwise, spiritual apathy will lead to spiritual decay.

Another big-ticket daily choice...is **will I live for others or me?** Every day we decide who we live for. Many default to live for themselves. The monster of self-centeredness is so strong in most of us that it is the default setting of our lives. "It's all about me, me, me!" It is like the actor who was telling one of his admirers about all his accomplishments and was going on and on. He finally stopped and said, "Well, enough of my going on about myself...what do you think about me?"

Radiant followers of Christ learn to yield to Christ words. When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, *"Whoever desires to come after Me let ... him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."* (Mark 8:34)

Following Jesus means living for others-which means in simplest terms that we share Christ with those who do not know Him. He calls us to build others up and to serve them. Paul wrote, *“Don’t be selfish; don’t live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don’t think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.”* (Philippians 2:3-4)

Finally, ask, **"Will I live for the culture or for Christ?"** Our culture invites some hard choices. Our culture says choose despair if feels like everything is taking us under. God invites us to choose life. He promises to go with us through deep waters and to see us through the rivers of difficulty. He does not allow the fires of oppression to burn us up. (Isaiah 43:2) Our culture says to get even when someone does you wrong, but Jesus says to love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5, 6) Our culture says it OK to participate in pre-marital and extra-marital relationships, but Christ says that the pure in heart see God. Our culture says to store up treasures on earth, but Christ says to store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy. Our culture says to worry about how much stuff you have and what kinds of stuff you have, but Christ says not to worry, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Our culture says to judge others by what you see and hear on TV, the radio, in school, or the market place, but Christ says, *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”*

Friends, I trust that the Holy Spirit has been speaking to you. You hear God's voice raising some critical choices. I challenge you to review your sermon notes and circle that one area, that one critical choice that the Holy Spirit keeps calling you to work on the week to come. What is God saying to you? What critical choice is He telling you to make? Listen to His voice. It's a matter of life or death.

I hope that in the week to come we will make life giving choices. God has given us a great opportunity to bring life to our relationships with our family, friends, church and community. So let us choose to head toward his voice by choosing wisely today and everyday. 2297