



continuous conversion

The deceptive nature of choices

I work with teenagers every day as their teacher. One theme that pops up again and again in conversations with these kids has to do with choices.

“Make good choices,” the kids are urged by parents and pastors.

While this is sterling advice, I do wonder how these 15-and-16-year old kids can possibly know how to make a good choice, or even what

makes a choice “good.” How can someone so young have any idea of the “down-the road” impact of even the most innocent-looking choice?

Teen-age assurance

When I was their age, I was 100% certain I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Anyone approaching me with some lecture about choices would have found a stubborn girl, whose complete naiveté and lack of wisdom was matched only by her unwillingness to think though the consequences of her choices.

At that time, and until I was into my 30’s, I was also convinced that any decision I made was strictly temporary. I had an adventuresome spirit, and told myself that I could try just about anything new. If I didn’t like it, or if the choice became problematical, I could always go back and choose all over again.



Delauney
“Red
Tower”
1912

by Sara Tusek

In other words I approached life like a big store, maybe Target (though in those days it would have been K-Mart). If I went down the paint aisle and found no artists’ brushes, all I had to do was try the crayon/pen aisle. It would have taken away all the fun to ask for help, and I never even considered the time I was using up as I meandered around.

Mid-life wake-up

Then suddenly one day I had a direct confrontation with an un-

pleasant reality. You could say I looked mortality in the face for the first time. I was 32 years old.

As recently as the day before, I envisioned life as a vast arena of opportunity in which I could, at my leisure, pick and choose my experiences, or (even more exciting) accept what randomly came my way. I was just getting good at finding opportunities, and developing the confidence to reach higher, as they say.

But all this came crashing down on my head as I finally saw myself as I really was—a certain age, with a complicated life that was the result of choices I had made many years ago. I liked, even loved, most of those choices, but that day I realized they were as much set in stone as the tombs of the pharaohs. To imagine that I could retrace my steps and remake even one of those choices was ludicrous.

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You can't go back

It's taken me the past 25 years to really come to terms with my realization on that long-ago day. When I finally accepted that my life was of my own making (in terms of choices) and that the choices involved other people and could not be treated so cavalierly as I had up to that point, I grew up.

And growing up is not a one-time shot, as you may know. We grow up in one area through some hard inner discipline or some harsh outer circumstances, and feel that we have earned the right to call ourselves adults. Then we see how pitifully short we fall of maturity in some unrelated part of our lives. So we start again, to grow up. It never ends.

But one thing I know for sure—you can't go back. There is no "back" to go to. The situation in which you found yourself "pre-choice," so to speak, ceased to exist the moment you made that choice. And even if you made the choice casually, with a "what-the heck" attitude, or made it by default, by failing to choose another option, that choice is made. It's just as certified, sealed and delivered as any court ruling.

Grace is living with bad choices in God's love

So here (finally!) we see God's grace. What if our choices were bad ones? Selfish, short-sighted, etc.? What if we've hurt the people we love through those poorly-considered choices? What if (like me) your choices pretty well stunk for decades?

That's where God's grace comes in. He takes your past choices and makes something beautiful out of them. It's as if He were indeed, as Scripture says, a potter, and we the clay—the clay used to make a misshapen, dirty, totally unattractive pot of our own devising. A pitiful mess of a pot.

But God, in His limitless grace and mercy, takes our pathetic pot and throws it again, producing a useful and perhaps even beautiful pot. The process of being rethrown may hurt—certainly it

hurts our pride, if nothing else—but look what we get out of it! A new, nice-looking pot—a new, better-than-ever life. This is God's grace to us.



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Being careful with choices

If you are a Christian, or just an everyday church-goer, you already know the drill for making good choices. Consult the Scriptures—get the advice of fellow believers

("the counsel of the saints")—and ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide.

Yet anyone who's tried to live this life of godly choices knows that you can still manage to make some real howlers of bad choices. The car that was a lemon; the job that was a nightmare; the marriage that was an on-going challenge. There's no fool-proof formula for making decent choices.

But Christians do have one tremendous advantage in the "bad-choice" clean-up: God. He will, as the Scripture promises, use all things for good for those of us who love Him and are called according to His purposes.

Don't overlook the second part of His promise; we must be called, and be following His will, not our own, if we expect Him to redeem our bad choices. And following His will is not as easy as some would have us believe. In fact, I have found that following His will becomes harder as I have more personal resources. I am too often tempted to do it "my way," just because I can.

Choices are tricky, but with God they can be faced with confidence and, when needed, redeemed. With God, we can look ahead to see where our choices lead. With God, we can make good choices, even when we are totally in the dark about where we're going. He is a light in the darkness, and can guide us to make the choices He has already ordained through His sovereign will. He can take our bad choices and redeem them. He is awesome and full of majesty, for He is God, and His choices are righteous, just and true, for ever and ever.

