

## Growing in Christ

### *Part 10: 'Maturity: A Daily Choice'*

In my last sermon, I dared to suggest that one thing and one thing only lay at the foundation of Christian maturity and that was **responsibility**. Taking personal responsibility for every aspect of our lives is both fundamental and foundational if we are to grow up in any sense, but it is especially true if we are to grow in Christ and mature as Jesus' disciples.

It would be great if we all got to this point automatically as we reached adulthood and when we came to faith in Christ, but that is simply not the case and there are millions of adults who have never taken full responsibility for their own lives.

Now when I say "take responsibility" what do I mean? Surely every independent adult in the world has done that by virtue of the fact that they make their own decisions and set their own course in life. Not so - not completely anyway. In fact there are countless people in this world (and many of them are in the Church) who spend much of their days passing the buck to those around them in all sorts of subtle and not so subtle ways.

This happens so regularly and is so much a part of our lives we that may not even notice it. We blame our parents or our poor childhood; we blame our employer or our work colleagues; we blame those who lead us in local, state and federal Governments; we blame our spouse or our in-laws; we blame Satan or even God for our bad choices. It is part of our fallen, sinful nature to pass the responsibility for aspects of our lives to others around us and even those who have gone before us.

The bottom line is this: every day you are faced with choices. It doesn't matter if you're having a great day or a horrible day - you are faced with the same choices. In fact, there are probably hundreds of choices before you every day.

Let me suggest just a few:

*You can choose to be sad - or you can choose to be happy.*

*You can choose to be a victim - or you can choose to be a victor.*

*You can choose death - or you can choose life .*

*You can choose to sulk - or you can choose get over it.*

*You can choose to focus on what God has already done for you - or you can choose to focus on what He hasn't done for you yet.*

*You can choose to be offended - or you can choose to forget it.*

*You can choose to look at your sin and failure all day long - or you can choose to embrace God's forgiveness, press on and leave the past behind.*

*You can choose to serve others' needs - or you can choose to focus on your own needs.*

*You can choose to forgive - or you can choose to hold resentment in your heart.*

*You can choose to believe what God says - or you can choose to believe what your fallen mind and wicked heart tell you.*

*You can choose to please God – or you can choose to please man.*

*You can choose to pick the lilies and learn from your times in the valley, or you can choose to trample on the lilies, learn nothing and strive to get out of the valley as soon as possible.*

*You can choose to take charge of your life and act - or you can choose to let others take charge of your life by reacting*

*You can choose to trust - or you can choose to doubt.*

*You can choose to submit to God - or you can choose to go it alone.*

*You can choose to be yourself - or you can choose to be what others expect you to be.*

*You can choose to take people at face value - or you can choose to analyse them and look for a hidden agenda.*

*You can choose to see the good in people - or you can choose to focus on their shortcomings.*

*You can choose to love - or you can choose to hate.*

*You can choose to build up - or you can choose to tear down.*

The list goes on ... and they are all your choice. It really is that simple. Every moment of every day you and I are faced with choices - the outcome of which can and does affect us, our family, the whole Church and the society in which we live.

Basically, the bottom line is this: life is an unpredictable and at times treacherous journey into the unknown. There are no guarantees other than God's love and grace and everything can change in the twinkling of an eye. Those who are maturing and growing in Christ will accept the simple truth that some days we are the pigeon and some days we are the statue. On the days when things are not going well or we are wounded or bruised in some way we just need to get over it.

We cannot afford to be offended or hurt when people or life or God don't treat us the way we would like. When our children are hurt - they cry, we tell them not to cry because crying about it and dwelling on the pain will not change anything or make it better, it will just make them feel worse. Basically, as gently as we can, we tell them to get over it. Well, guess what? Millions of kids didn't learn that lesson because they are still crying 20 years later when something doesn't go their way and the solution now is the same as it was back then - they just need to choose to get over it and move on.

Friends, we will not take this nation for Jesus while we are binding our wounds and complaining about our lot in life. We have to get over it - all of it - whatever it is that holds us back. We have to let it go and let God give us the ability to move on. Let me give you some tips which you can remind yourself of each day as you learn to get over it much quicker and the acrostic might help you memorise this.

**G**rowing up is a choice

**E**njoy what God has already given you

**T**rust God to supply your needs not your wants

**O**mnipotence dwells within you

**V**ictor or victim: it's your daily choice

**E**very day is a new day

**R**eact or act: it's your choice

**I**ncomparable riches are yours in Christ

**T**omorrow is another day!

Every day we have a choice how we respond to ourselves, to others and to God. Every day we make subconscious decisions which have a powerful impact on who we are and what we do. For example when something happens to you which is unexpected or unwelcomed, you may have little or no choice about facing that issue or person. Yet you have a clear choice as to how they will impact your life. There are many things which are said and done to us over which we have no control - but as soon as we allow that person or that circumstance to trigger a reaction in us - we have lost control of our life. We have let go of the steering wheel and let someone else direct our thoughts and actions.

It is so easy to throw your hands up in the air and cry “unfair!” any child can do that, but the real grown ups (as distinct from those of us who pretend we are grown up) are supposed to maintain control and act in a way that minimises the negative impact of the situation and maximises the positive impact. Mature people will always see positive things in the midst of the worst disaster. When mature people fail they don't see failure, they see another learning experience. They see another opportunity to develop their sense of humour. So they get up, dust themselves off, learn some lessons and press on.

So what kind of choices have you made today? What kind of choices have you made this week? What kind of choices will you make tomorrow? Our lives are filled with choices. We must make choices constantly and we often do so without thinking much about them. We make significant choices and insignificant ones. It's the insignificant ones that we don't seem to think much about. But when you add up a number of them they become significant because they set the course of your life.

I want to suggest to you that every choice we make, big or small, is a choice for God or against God. Yes, I said every choice has that much significance. You may ask, “Does that mean then that whether I brushed my teeth this morning is a choice for or against God?” Yes it is. When you decide to take care of the body God gave you, with the means He gave you, then you act in favour of God – not to mention all of us who have to smell your breath!

When you decide to say a kind word to someone you act in favour of God Who cares about their feelings and wants to use you to encourage them. When you decide to turn away from the lust of your eyes then you act in favour of God Who desires that you should worship Him and not created beings. When you decide to honour your husband or wife or obey your parents, you act in favour of God Who wants to have order in family relationships that godly children might result.

Is it a decision for or against God whether I turn right or left at the first intersection I come to when I leave church today? Yes it is. Why? Simply because your time and where you go every minute of every day is valuable to God. The best use of your time and your whereabouts matter to God because you only have 86,400 seconds every day and when they are gone – you never get them back. What you do with every one of those seconds matters to God and only you can decide how you use the limited time you have. It's always your choice.

The Bible has a lot to say about the choices we make each day and the impact they have on our lives and the lives of others. Here are just a few verses to remind us:

**Joshua 24:15** *“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”*

**Deuteronomy 30:19** *“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”*

**1 Kings 18:21** *“Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing.*

**1 Corinthians 10:31** *“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”*

**Mark 8:34** *“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”*

**James 4:17** *“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.”*

**Romans 12:2** *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

**Colossians 3:17** *“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

**Colossians 3:23** *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.”*

**Matthew 6:33** *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

**Psalms 27:4** *“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”*

Our life is full of choices – every day – but always remember this: *“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.”* (1 John 4:4). So as we embrace the next chapter of our lives, let’s pledge to make better choices and why not start that right now by affirming the following choices together:

*Lord, I choose life and not death.*

*Lord, I choose freedom and not bondage.*

*Lord, I choose victory and not defeat.*

*Lord, I choose to be thankful for what You’ve already done, before I cry out to You for more.*

*Lord, I choose to believe what You have said and not trust my fallen heart.*

*Lord, I choose to act and not react.*

*Lord, I choose to find You in the valley as I journey towards the mountain.*

*Lord, I choose to forgive and not resent.*

*Lord, I choose to bless and not curse.*

*Lord, I choose to believe and not doubt.*

*Lord, I choose to rejoice in times of hardship.*

*Lord, I choose to build up and not tear down.*

*Lord, I choose to serve the needs of others above our own.*

*Lord, I choose to get out of the boat and trust You!*