

Your Decisions Determine What You Become

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes that our daily decisions to deny self-will determine our spiritual growth and relationship with God.

Scripture: John 6:38, Romans 15:3, 1 Corinthians 15:41, Hebrews 5:14

Topics: "Decision Making", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that our daily decisions shape our spiritual lives, urging us to follow Jesus' example of denying self-will to fulfill God's will. He illustrates how Jesus consistently chose to please the Father, even in the hidden years of His life, and challenges us to reflect on our own choices that either lead to spiritual maturity or carnality. Poonen warns that the accumulation of small decisions can lead to significant differences in our spiritual state over time, and he encourages young people to take their lives seriously, making choices that align with God's purpose. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to self-denial and faithfulness in our walk with God, reminding us that time is precious and should not be wasted.

Transcript

"I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn. 6:38).

Jesus tells us here in His own words what He came on earth to do. And in this one sentence we have a description of how Jesus lived every single day of His entire life on earth.

The thirty years of Jesus' life in Nazareth are referred to as hidden years. But here Jesus reveals what He did during every day of those 30 years: He denied His own will and did His Father's will.

When Jesus was with the Father in heaven from eternity past, He never had to deny His own will, for His own will was the same as His Father's. But when He came to earth in our flesh, that flesh had a self-will that was diametrically opposed to the Father's will at every single point. The only way in which Jesus could do the Father's will then was by denying His own self-will all the time. This was the cross that Jesus bore throughout His earthly life - the crucifixion of His self-will - and which He now asks us to bear every day, if we are to follow Him.

It was the consistent denial of His own will that made Jesus a spiritual Man. And it is the denial of our self-will that will make us spiritual too.

Every day we make decisions concerning various matters. We make decisions in relation to how we are going to spend our money or our spare time, or how to speak to, or about someone, or how to write a particular letter, or how to react to another's behaviour, or how much time to spend in studying the Word or in prayer or in serving the church etc. We react to the actions and words and behaviour of people around us from morning till night. We may not be realising it, but we make at least a hundred decisions every day - and in each of these decisions we decide either to please ourselves or to please God.

Many of our actions are not the result of conscious decisions. But even then, we do them in one of these two ways - either seeking to please ourselves or to glorify God. Our unconscious actions are determined by the way we make our conscious decisions. Finally, it is the sum total of these decisions that determine whether we become spiritual or carnal.

Think of the millions of decisions that we have made ever since we were first converted. Those who have consciously and consistently chosen to deny their self-will many times each day and do the will of God, have become spiritual. On the other hand, those who have rejoiced merely in the forgiveness of their sins, and who therefore chose to please themselves most of the time have remained carnal. Each person's decisions have determined what he has finally become.

You are today as humble and as holy and as loving as you yourself have chosen to be, through the thousands of decisions that you have made in the various situations of life in past years.

Spirituality is not something that comes through one encounter with God. It is the result of choosing the way of self-denial and doing God's will consistently day after day, week after week and year after year.

Consider the spiritual state of two brothers (both converted to Christ on the same day), ten years after their conversion. One is now a mature brother with spiritual discernment, to whom God can commit much responsibility in the church. The other is still a child, without discernment, and needing to be fed and encouraged by others constantly.

What is it that has made such a difference between the two?

The answer is: The little decisions that they took during each day of the ten years of their Christian life.

If they continue on the same way, in another ten years, the difference between them will be even more pronounced. And in eternity, their differing degrees of glory will be as different as the light emitted by a 2000 watt bulb and a 5 watt bulb!

"One star differs from another in glory" (1 Cor. 15:41).

Consider a situation where you are visiting a home and you are tempted to say something negative about a certain brother (whom you don't like) who is not present. What do you do? Will you yield to that temptation and backbite, or will you deny yourself and keep your mouth shut? Nobody ever gets struck down by God with leprosy or cancer just because they spoke evil about someone. No. And therefore many imagine that such a sin will not destroy their lives. Alas, it is only in eternity that many brothers and sisters will realise how every time they pleased themselves, they destroyed themselves a little. Then they will regret the way they wasted their lives on earth.

Jesus too was tempted in similar situations for thirty years in Nazareth. It is written about those hidden years that "He never pleased Himself" at any time (Rom. 15:3). He always denied Himself. Thus He

pleased the Father at all times.

Pleasing oneself can be done in many areas of one's life - for example, in the area of eating. Consider a situation where, even when you are not hungry, you decide to spend some money to buy some tasty snacks to eat. There is nothing sinful or wrong in that. But it speaks of a certain way of life. Because you have money, you buy what you like, whether you need it or not. You do what pleases yourself. If you feel like buying something, you buy it. If you feel like going somewhere, you go. If you feel like sleeping late, you sleep late. What is the end result of living like that, even if you go regularly to the meetings and read your Bible every day? You may not lose your salvation, but you will certainly waste the one life that God gave you to live for Him.

Another brother however acts differently. He decides to discipline his body. When he is not hungry, he decides not to eat anything unnecessarily. He decides never to buy any unnecessary things for himself. He decides to get up 15 minutes earlier each day to spend time with God. When someone speaks to him angrily, he decides to reply gently. He decides to remain in love and goodness always. He decides not to read certain news items in the newspapers that will stimulate his lusts. In every situation, he decides to humble himself and not to justify himself. He decides to give up certain friendships that are influencing him towards the world. Through constantly deciding to deny his own will (what pleased him), he becomes strong in his will to please God alone.

What did he lose by not buying that unnecessary thing, or getting out of bed 15 minutes earlier, or by giving up his human sense of dignity and asking for forgiveness? Nothing. But think of what he has gained!

A man like that, who is consistently faithful in the little things will in a few years' time become a trustworthy man of God - not because of the Bible-knowledge that he possesses, but because of his faithfulness in the little decisions he takes in life not to please himself but to please God.

Don't be weak-willed then. Exercise your will to please God at all times. Mature Christians are those who "because of practice (in exercising their will in the right direction through many years) have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14).

Consider an illustration: Two fat men go to a doctor to remove their flabbiness. The doctor gives them a course of exercises for the next twelve months. One man goes through the discipline of those exercises consistently every day, and slims down and becomes strong. The other man does the exercises for the first few days and then slackens off and finally gives up altogether. His pot-belly gets fatter and fatter with his undisciplined ways, until he finally dies prematurely. This is an illustration of how we can make our wills strong to do God's will, or leave them flabby and weak for the devil to exploit.

I remember reading once of a young servant of the Lord who felt that he had been watching too much television (even though he had been watching only clean programmes), and who decided one day not only to sell his TV set, but also to use the time he had spent watching TV, in prayer every day. As a direct result of that little decision that he took - and maintained - God gave him a ministry that blessed thousands.

Those who see nothing wrong in watching clean programmes over TV, find that God does not entrust them with much - for He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him and there is no partiality with Him.

Yes, you are what you are today because of the many, many little decisions they you have taken in relation to either denying yourself or pleasing yourself in the areas of food, money, sleep, reading, etc.

Time is running out fast. Those who are over forty years of age, and who have spent their lives pleasing themselves cannot expect to do much for God now, for they have wasted the best years of their lives. Those past years of your life are gone - gone forever. Even Almighty God cannot restore them to you. But if you repent even now, you may yet be able to do something useful for God with the second half of your life.

But I want to speak primarily to those who are still in their teenage years and in their twenties. Let me tell you that God wants to bless you in such a way that you become a blessing to others. He wants to entrust an important ministry in His church to you by the time you are thirty or thirty five years old. But will He find you faithful in the next ten years or so of your life, so that He can accomplish His will in your life?

If you determine to be faithful from now on, you will have no regrets in eternity, no matter how much you may have failed in your past life up until now. Take life seriously then. Think of how Jesus lived in the days of His flesh in Nazareth, and follow His example. Say to yourself, "I have been born on this earth, to DENY my own will, and to do the will of my Heavenly Father."

Do you think the devil will allow you to take seriously what I am telling you now? No. He will tell you that there is plenty of time. He will tell you that such a life of self denial will be a strain. He will tell you that God doesn't mind you enjoying yourself, or indulging yourself a little bit here and there. He will tell you to take it easy, etc., etc. Why? Because he wants you to drift aimlessly for the next twenty years, and to wake up when it is too late. Young people, don't be fooled by Satan. God has given you only one life, and time is running out fast. Don't waste it.

You will find more than enough believers around you (even among those who have understood the new and living way) who have no interest in living such a disciplined, wholehearted life. Don't judge them. Don't be a Pharisee and despise them. Mind your own business and don't be a busybody in their affairs. Believe the best about them and leave them alone. But at the same time don't follow their example. Be different. Let Jesus alone be your Example. You have a calling over your life and you cannot afford to lose that, no matter what else you may lose on this earth. Think often of the day when you will have to give an account of your life at the judgment seat of Christ.

So forget the blunders that you have made in life. Repent radically of your sins and be wholehearted in the days to come. God forgives you and blots out your past. Don't mope over your failures now, or you will be a drifter in the future too. The memory of your failures will help you to recognise that you are what you are today only by the grace of God. It will also enable you to keep your face in the dust at all times before God.

Determine that you will become a true man / woman of God. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

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