
Two Good Choices

Some time ago I had a conversation with someone who is nearing retirement. He runs a business and he is good at what he does, but he pondered this: "How would my life have been different had I continued beyond high school and became an engineer or an architect?" He has the intellect for further studies, and I suspect he would have done well. It is impossible, of course, to know how different life would have been if we had made different choices.

If we become too focused on the question of "What if?", we can be filled with regret, especially if our lives aren't quite what they think they could have been. Someone who has a difficult marriage might well believe that her life would have been so much better had she not broken off that relationship with her first boyfriend. Or someone might question whether the decision to sell the farm and begin working out was the best option. If we focus on what might have been, we might well idealize it and find ourselves living a life of regret.

There are those who would say that God has laid out a path for us, and it is our job to discover what that path should be. This understanding of how God works is called determinism wherein God determines all that should happen beforehand, and we are obligated to discover what he has already determined. Those who hold this view tend to live in a bit of fear, afraid to make the wrong decision, believing that in every choice that we must make there is a right and a wrong. Making the wrong choice moves us out of God's will and into a world of hurt. Or so they believe.

But is life full of right and wrong choices? A student finishing high school might well have to make a decision between becoming an auto mechanic or a HVAC technician. He might be adept with his hands, and both options might be equally good. Does God have a path marked out for him that if he does not take it, he has made a wrong decision? Does God will that he become a mechanic, and if he doesn't, does that mean that he is outside of God's will? Does he automatically remove himself from God's blessings if he makes the wrong choice? Or what about the young woman who finds herself having to choose between two suitors, both of whom are entirely appropriate and both of whom could become wonderful husbands? Is it possible that she could make the wrong decision and choose the wrong man? Would her life have been so much better if she had chosen differently?

The reality is we will never know. It would be interesting if there were parallel universes, and we could see how things turned out if we had made different choices, but that is not the way it is. We make choices, and we must live with those choices. And often times there is neither a right nor wrong choice, for both are equally good. We may not be able to discern that one option is preferable over the other, and we have to choose.

Robert Frost, in his poem, *The Road Not Taken*, says that as he travelled, he came to a fork in the road, and he had to choose one of two paths. He knew that he would not be able to come back to the fork and make a different choice, for, as he says we know "how one way leads to another" he doubted he would ever return to this point. In the end, he chose the road that was less travelled and, as he put it, "that has made

all the difference.” He doesn’t say if the difference was positive or negative, only that in choosing as he did, his life was different from what it could have been. Neither choice was the wrong choice, but the choice he made changed his entire life.

The truth be told, we will never know if God does have one specific path marked out for us, obligating us to discover that path. We can’t even be sure that we are on the path that he has chosen for us, for we don’t know if we have made all the right decisions. If we believe that God has only one way for us to go, then if we make the wrong decision, we will never be able to return back to his will, not because we are unwilling but because we are incapable. If that were true, life could become a misery rather than a blessing.

Some would say that because God is sovereign, he has marked out a way for us and we are obligated to follow it. They say that is evidence of God’s sovereignty. But that belief might be a misunderstanding of God’s sovereignty. Whether or not God has a preference for what choices I make, I do not know. (I am not talking about making immoral, unethical or ungodly choices, but rather making choices that are equally appropriate.) God may have a preference, I do not know, but this I do know: no matter what choice we make, we can be assured that God remains sovereign in our lives. In other words, as long as we are living faithfully before the Lord, there may not be a wrong or right decision. Regardless of what direction we take, no decision that we make will confound God or thwart his purposes for us and the world. Rather, we can be confident that he is so wonderfully sovereign that he can accomplish his purposes through us regardless of whether we become a mechanic or HVAC technician. Maybe the spouse we end up marrying is not the “perfect” match. And maybe choosing to work out rather than farming might not be the best suited for our gifts. God is not hindered by our decisions, and he will accomplish his goals, and he will do so through us, for that is how he often works in this world. We can be assured that God, who is our loving and faithful Father through Jesus Christ is always big enough to carry us through.

We often come to forks in the road, but we need not agonize over whether we can make a wrong decision and find ourselves travelling away from God. God is on both roads, and when we choose one or the other, we can be sure that he is there with us, and he is there for us. This is what it means to have a God who is sovereign: it means that we can live without worry or fear and without regret, for God is always with us.

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