

Life Lessons from Desert Wondering – Choices
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I saw in the news in the past few weeks; some National Parks have been doing searches for lost people. Since the parks are starting to get busy with people, the likely issue of people getting lost increases. One female hiker they found dead about two days after she started. Another hiker was found dead at another park close to the trailhead of the trail. I hiked that same trail many years ago in Arizona. When you begin a hike, a hiker has to make many choices. What type of shoes to wear, how much water to bring, how much food to bring, should the trail be mapped out first and if so, which trails to hike on, what type of clothes to wear, should one bring bug spray or bear spray, who should one tell before hand in case of trouble, and should one bring a first-aid kit. There are other questions that should be asked, but you can see a hiker has to make a lot of choices and those choices can help with a life-or-death situation. Robert Frost wrote a famous poem called *The Road Not Taken*. At the end of the poem. We find this statement, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference". This sounds nice, but for this statement to become true, right choices have to be made. If wrong choices are made, then this less traveled road can become a nightmare. Just think about all the choices you already made this morning. You made the choice to get out of bed, what to eat for breakfast, what clothes to put on, made the choice of travel, choice of roads to take, and the choice of where to sit at this morning. God has given us the ability to make choices. The problem with us is trying to make the "right" choices. That is not always easy. We are limited in our knowledge of the future and we have a hard time knowing what the outcomes will be for the choices we make. I saw a person one time make the choice to buy a large item at Lowe's. When they pushed the large box to their vehicle, the box was as big as their Honda Civic. They had no way of getting the large box home. That person made a bad choice. They should have made sure the box had a good way of being transported home in a safe manner before they bought it. It's hard to make right choices. Christians have the same trouble at times. We have choices to make, but sometimes we are clueless

in what is the best choice. How do we interpret the Bible in the right way or what is false truth verses Absolute Truth and the list can go on and on. Today, we'll look at what God gave to Israel on how to make right choices. There is much we can learn from studying the Old Testament.

Let's turn to Deuteronomy 30: 1-8 "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, ²and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. ⁵And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. ⁶And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. ⁷And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. ⁸And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today." ESV – Biblegateway.com

God is reminding Israel who He is. He is their God or as King David would say, "God is my salvation". Israel is to remember this because this would help guide them in the choices they make. In verse 8, God tells them to obey His voice and keep all his commandments. These laws and commands were to help Israel make the right choices in living out the Covenant God had made for them. These commands would help them to live with their neighbors who were pagans. To live out these commands, they needed to remember their past with God. Israel had just spent 40 years in the wilderness and Moses is ready to retire from this life. Israel was disobedient to God and this was why they were in the wilderness. They would forget what and how God had rescued them from their slavery in Egypt. In fact, verse 4 states Israel doesn't have the mind to do this in the correct way. They

have eyes, but can't see. They have a mind, but it doesn't understand the ways of God. In other words, as a Christian, you can't make right choices when dealing with Godly things because your mind is limited to Godly things. Israel had a hard time understanding God's laws and why they had to obey them – the laws were for their own good and they couldn't see it. We have many blind Christians today. Many Christians today are just like Israel. Israel needed hope.

God gives that in verse 6 where God tells Israel that their descendants will one day enjoy the time when God will circumcise their hearts so that they will finally be able to love God with all their heart and soul. Then, it will be easier for the people of Israel to make the right choices of life. The Hebrew term used here for "circumcise" means to commit to covenant obedience from within (Strong's Concordance). God is telling Israel there will come a time when they will be able to be obedient to God out of love from within and then they will be able to live. To live the life God wants all of us to live. It all goes back again to the Great Commandment. We've been talking about this for awhile now and it seems the Great Command is the center of all God's commands. Do we really love our Lord as we say we do? The Hebrew's writer lets us know that Jesus is the example for us in Hebrews 5: 7, "While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to be the one who could deliver him out of death. And God heard His prayers because of His reverence for God. So even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. (NLT)" Jesus was obedient to His Father out of love for Him and now we have His Spirit within that will help us to do the same thing. The Spirit will help us to make the right choices in how to live an obedient life for God. How fortunate we are!

Let's continue to Deuteronomy 30: 9-10 where we read this, ⁹"The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, ¹⁰when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." ESV – Biblegateway.com

Why do we want to make the right choices in life? Verse 9 gives us the answer. The Lord will again delight in you. The KJV has “rejoice”. Just like a parent who rejoices over their children when they make good choices, God rejoices when we make right choices. Most good children will try to please their parents by making good choices out of love. We want to make good choices to make our Lord rejoice. Then in verse ten we see that what makes God rejoice is when we make the choice to keep all His commands and decrees that is written in the Word of God. Plus, we do this with all our heart and soul. Proverbs 3: 5-6 states, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (NIV)” Trust the Lord with all your heart and submit “all” your ways to Him. In other words, when we get up in the morning, we need to tell the Lord we submit all our ways today to Him and we trust Him to help us to make the right choices. Last week, I had a water incident at one of our lakes at the park and I had to get out the Ranger boat. As I look back on that incident, so many things could have gone wrong. Most of the issues is from poor park procedures like making the choice to first check the gas tank – only a ¼ full. I filled it before I left the dock because someone else didn’t. Also, for some reason taking a rope which would be so helpful to me later in the incident. When I received the call, the first thing I did was say a prayer and ask Jesus to help me make the right decisions. I couldn’t ask Him to take the problem away because it had already happened. I needed and wanted God’s help in making the right choices during the boat incident. My trust in the Lord grew stronger that day and that’s a good thing. How often do you get the Lord involved in your choices on a daily basis?

Let’s turn to Deuteronomy 30: 11-14 where we read, ¹¹ “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.” ESV – BibleGateway.com

Our choices can be guided because the Word of God is very near to us, it's in our mouth and in our heart. Jesus told us in John 14: 26, "But when the father sends the Counselor as my representative – and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit – he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you. (NLT)" Not only can the Spirit guide us in everything in knowing Jesus, but He is more than capable of helping us make good choices in a world that is always changing every second. Think about all the bad choices you've made throughout your life. How often was God involved? Sometimes God allows us to make choices we think are bad, but those choices help us draw closer to Him. However, in most cases we make bad choices when we make our own choices without God.

We'll finish with what Moses tells Israel in Deuteronomy 30: 19-20, " ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." ESV - Biblegateway.com

We are to love the Lord, obey His voice because He is "our life" as we read in verse 20. Just like a husband and wife try to make decisions together, we want the Lord involved in our choice making because "He is our life". Again, we need to ask the Lord each day to help us make the right choices. He knows best for us. Israel missed the boat on this type of relationship with God and many still do today. If the Lord is our life, then we want the Lord to help us make right choices. Paul tells us in verse 5 of Romans 8, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. (NLT)" The Spirit of God will lead us to make the right choices and this brings great delight to God. Let's bring delight to God and allow Him to guide us on a daily basis.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001