

MAKING CHOICES

Steven Lefebvre

“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for July 21–27, 2014.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

[Watch video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AToIFMWaZf4&feature=youtu.be>]

MEET THE WRITER

My name is **Steven Lefebvre**. I work with the youth and young adults at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Before my life of working at a church, I was the lead vocalist in a hardcore band. These days, I spend my free time being an armchair film critic, reading comic books, and playing much quieter music (well, sort of). I’m also an amateur champion of darts and dodge ball. I’m a huge fan of going to baseball games in the summertime and to college basketball games in the winter. You can read my blog at www.stevenlefebvre.blogspot.com.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- a white board or newsprint
- markers
- pens
- paper
- copies of “The Serenity Prayer” (see “Sharing in Prayer” below)

PLUGGED IN

- + “The Paradox of Choice” (<http://youtu.be/VO6XEQIsCoM>), by Barry Schwartz, is a TED talk about freedom of choice. He suggests that having too many choices is overwhelming, disappointing, and paralyzing.
- + In the movie *Cast Away* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0162222/>), a man stranded on an island must change physically, mentally, emotionally in order to survive. At the end of the film is a fantastic scene about powerlessness.

CHECKING IN

When it comes to making choices, we need to start by asking, *In what areas of my life do I have the opportunity to make choices?*

Make a Venn diagram (<http://www.mathsisfun.com/sets/venn-diagrams.html>) with three circles. Write in one circle, “God’s Job?” Write in another circle, “My Job?” Write in a third circle, “Don’t Know.”

Distribute paper and pens. Invite everyone to write an answer to each of these questions:

What are three things that happened today that involved you?

What is one thing or person that keeps causing you stress or struggle?

If you could choose to do anything you want tomorrow, what would it be?

After about ten minutes, bring the group together. Invite volunteers to read their answers. After each response, invite group members to decide which choices, feelings, and/or conflicts belong in each of the circles: *God’s Job*, *My Job*, or *Don’t know*.

Discuss:

Were you surprised by how many choices, feelings, and conflicts were listed in each circle?

What do we do with the choices that are God’s job? What do we do with the items in our circle?

How do you feel knowing that some things are out of your control?

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Romans 7:14–23

I have good news and bad news. The good news is that we all have choices. We can choose how we spend our time, what clothes we are going to wear, what goes into our bodies, and so on. The bad news is that the list of choices we can make is actually pretty limited. We are utterly powerless over how other people act and feel; and at times we are even powerless over our own thoughts and actions.

But the dilemma is nothing new. In Romans 7:14–23, the Apostle Paul addresses the same struggle. He wants to do the right thing. He wants to do well. Yet, for some reason that he can’t explain, he sabotages his attempts to do what is right. Is he bad, rotten to the core? Did God make a mistake in creating him? I would firmly argue, No!

The truth is this: We live in a world that we did and did not help to create. Sometimes we get jealous, we lust, we worry, we feel insecure, we lie to protect ourselves, we get angry because something is unfair. The good news is that, like Paul, we aren’t happy with ourselves when we sin. In fact, a war is raging, a battle between our brokenness and the goodness that dwells deep within every human being God created.

So how do we win the war? The first step is recognizing when we have power and when we are utterly powerless, when we have choices and when we don't, when we can work to set things right and when we need God to intervene. Doing so begins to set things right because it puts God and us in our rightful places. No longer are we struggling to fix things that we have no power to fix. No longer are we struggling and stressing about things that are none of our business. Now we have new energy to fight the battles, to bring about goodness, and to make healthy choices in the areas that are our job. No longer are we wasting our time and energy trying to do what we cannot do.

In the kingdom of God, empires are destroyed, evildoers are brought to justice, and people become one with God. The kingdom of God comes and makes all things new, not with violence, big muscles, or superhuman strength but with meekness, grieving, and self-sacrificial love (Matthew 5). The same is true when it comes to making the right choices. We need to know when to act and when to let God take over.

Discuss:

How do you feel about the idea of powerlessness? Does it give you peace or make you feel frustrated?

What is the difference between giving something to God and inaction? What actions are required of us when we let God be God?

SHARING IN PRAYER

To close the sessions, invite group members to pray together "The Serenity Prayer," by Reinhold Niebuhr:

**"God, give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.**

**"Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that you will make all things right,
If I surrender to your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with you forever in the next. Amen."**

TAKING IT FURTHER

Point out that when we actually begin to trust God, a great deal comes up about how we see God. We ask questions such as these: *Does God care about me? What kind of world is God trying to re-create? How am I participating in the new creation? Does God want to punish me? What is grace about?*

Before the youth go home, ask them to choose partners. Explain that you will give them a set of questions to discuss with their partners tomorrow, but encourage them first to sleep on the conversation they will have. Then ask everyone to call his or her partner the next day and to discuss these questions: **How does God see us? How is our understanding of God different from what the Bible says about God?**

Perhaps you can pick up this conversation in your next session.

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