

The Choice  
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Proverbs 4:11-27

Life is full of choices and sometimes it wears you out! **Have you heard the term “decision fatigue?” Do you know what it is and how it affects our choices?** Ever find yourself in a meeting or with a customer at about 3:30 in the afternoon and the little voice in your head is saying, “Just make a decision even if it’s wrong!” Ever get home from a long day and your spouse asks, “*What would you like for dinner?*” and you almost begin to weep? 😊 (Kidding, but not much.)

An article in the New York Times explained: *“The more choices you make throughout the day, the harder each one becomes for your brain, and eventually it looks for shortcuts, usually in either of two very different ways. One shortcut is to become reckless: to act impulsively instead of expending the energy to first think through the consequences. (Sure, tweet that photo! What could go wrong?) The other shortcut is the ultimate energy saver: do nothing. Instead of agonizing over decisions, avoid any choice. Ducking a decision often creates bigger problems in the long run, but for the moment, it eases the mental strain.”*

They go on to say, *“Decision fatigue helps explain why ordinarily sensible people get angry at colleagues and families, splurge on clothes, buy junk food at the supermarket and can’t resist the dealer’s offer to rustproof their new car.”*<sup>i</sup> You’ve probably heard that Steve Jobs wore the same thing every day because he didn’t want to waste his brainpower on picking out clothes for the day. By the way, deciding correctly in advance BEFORE we are confronted with a choice is also the way to deal with temptation – but that’s another lesson!]

Choosing poorly on small decisions carries minimal risk. However, a series of poor “life choices” over time will alter the very direction and outcome of a life. The article says many people just try to NOT decide. Sometimes that’s not an option. Our Lifeway lesson writer

puts it this way: *“There is no neutrality when it comes to the truth.”* When it comes to following or rejecting God and His wisdom, NOT deciding IS deciding. In Proverbs 4, Solomon urges his children to “hear, obey, and not turn away” from the wisdom of God. God’s way is wise, rejecting His way leads to destruction.

Big Idea: On the journey of life we all have a choice of which “path” to take. Solomon contrasts these two paths as the way of the wise and the way of the foolish. Like any journey, the road we choose will determine both the quality of the trip and our final destination.

- Solomon begins chapter four again as a father speaking to children: “Listen...pay attention...learn good judgment.”
- Then for several verses he reminisces about how his father (David) taught him to “get wisdom” and “develop good judgment.”
- In verse eleven he uses a common metaphor in scripture and especially in Proverbs. He portrays life as journey with a choice of two paths.
- Scholars actually call this the “doctrine of the two ways in Proverbs.”
- These verses *“...show the wisdom or folly of the two paths ahead. One choice leads to a journey free of obstacles (4:12). The other leads to wickedness, violence (4:17) and stumbling along a dark path (4:19).”<sup>iii</sup>*
- Let’s read these verses noting this father’s instruction, his warning, the contrast of the two ways, and finally focus on HOW to choose well.

**Proverbs 4:11–27 (ESV) — 11** I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. **12** When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. **13** Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.

- Choosing the “way of wisdom” comes from embracing God’s instruction.
- It’s a path that’s easy to travel without obstacles that make us stumble.

- Beginning in verse fourteen he contrasts that with the wrong path:

**14** Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. **15** Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. **16** For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. **17** For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. **18** But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. **19** The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.

- The righteous path is “bright,” “straight,” so you won’t “stumble.”
- The path of the wicked is “deep darkness” and they can’t help but stumble.
- Stumbling was no small matter to people in Solomon’s day.
- Daniel Bricker writes, *“In a society that traveled primarily on foot the metaphor of the path or way functioned as an illustration of everyday living. The importance of making good choices on a journey through a wilderness was obvious. The wrong choice could lead at best to delays until the proper path could be re-located and at worst to becoming hopelessly lost and victimized by predators or bandits, and possibly death...“to stumble” is one of the most serious consequences of walking on the wrong path. In sparsely settled, lightly traveled regions a fall leading to an injury such as a severe sprain or a broken bone could virtually be a death sentence.”<sup>iv</sup>*
- In those days people walked many miles on dangerous paths. Today, with the choices and distractions on the road of life, I’d say the dangers of the “wrong path” are more frightening than the physical threats in that day.
- How does Solomon recommend we avoid the wrong road?

**20** My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.  
**21** Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart.

- The “wise path” starts with “internalizing” God’s Word. That process begins with our ears and winds up in our hearts.

- How do we “incline our ears” to God’s teaching? Incline means to lean in. Inclining our ears to God’s teaching requires both “tuning in” and “tuning out.” We have to “tune out” unproductive “noise” and “tune in” to His Word.
- “Don’t let them escape from your sight.” When I’m in charge of my twenty-one month old grandson I can’t let him out of my sight. He’s too important for me to neglect! We should be just as focused on not letting God’s Word get out of our sight. We should have eyes on God’s teaching every day.
- When it’s time for church, if my Bible is in the same place I left it a week ago I haven’t had it “in my sight” all week.
- Verse twenty-two says God’s Word is “life” and “healing” to us. We can’t receive that healing unless we INGEST His word.

**Jeremiah 15:16 (ESV) — 16** Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart...  
**In Matthew 4:4 (ESV) —** Jesus said, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

- It’s not just about hearing and reading God’s Word; it’s about absorbing it into our hearts. That’s because the heart is like a “heat-seeking missile.”

**23** Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

- Beware of what you let into your heart! Here is what I mean when I say the heart is like a “heat-seeking missile.” What we put into our mind can get into our hearts and what gets into your heart will “rule” your actions and conduct. It will direct us just like a “heat-seeking missile” finds the target.
- Illustration: Have you ever gotten “car fever?” New cars are all you see or think about. That’s just in your mind!
- Here’s a better example, once upon a time I got “Susan fever!” In fact I’m not over it yet after 36 years! When I got her in my heart she was all I could think about. She was prettier, funnier, and smarter than anyone else and wanting to be in her presence drove me like a “heart-seeking” missile!

- We choose what to let into our hearts; it can be the wisdom of God or the temptations and foolishness of the devil. Whatever we put in there will “guide” our emotions, choices, and decisions.
- The “directions” we plug into the GPS of our hearts will determine whether we take the path of wisdom or the path to destruction. By the way, the voice in that GPS is either the voice of God’s Holy Spirit or Satan himself.
- The Holy Spirit “option” in our GPS is only available by trusting Christ.
- Like any good daddy, Solomon also said, “watch your mouth!”

**24** Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.

- If bad stuff is coming out of my mouth it’s time to check my heart.

In **Matthew 15:18–19 (ESV)** — Jesus said, **18** But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. **19** For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

- Ever forget to take out the garbage and go on a trip? Peee-ew! If there’s garbage in my heart it will make it’s way OUT in my speech and actions.
- Finally, Solomon said, “Once your ears and eyes are focused on God’s wisdom and it’s plugged into your heart, STAY ON THE PATH.

**25** Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. **26** Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. **27** Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

- Don’t take a detour! Ignore the neon signs that lure you to take an exit down the wrong path. Stay glued to the “map” of God’s truth. Listen intently to the “GPS voice” of His Holy Spirit.

## So, What's the Takeaway?

- We all learned Robert Frost's famous poem that ends with this verse:  
*"I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference."*<sup>v</sup>
- Life is full of choices. The choices we make add up to the path we take -- the wise path of godly wisdom or the foolish path that leads to destruction.
- Do you have "decision fatigue" from all these choices in life?
- We don't have to suffer from spiritual decision fatigue if we'll make an advance and permanent choice to follow the wise way of God's truth.
- By plugging the truth of God's Word into our hearts, the GPS of His Holy Spirit will direct us on the "way of the righteous...which shines even brighter until the full light of day."
- When we walk on that path we won't be "held back" or "stumble." It will lead to a "good life" both now and forever.
- Two roads diverge in the woods of our lives, which one will we take?

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/21/magazine/do-you-suffer-from-decision-fatigue.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Daniel Bricker - THE DOCTRINE OF THE "TWO WAYS" IN PROVERBS

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<sup>iv</sup> ibid

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>