

# **Family Seasons**

## **The Choices We Make**

Lesson #2 for April 13, 2019

Scriptures: Ephesians 1:1-4; Matthew 22:35-37; 7:24-25; Proverbs 18:24; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Ecclesiastes 2:1-11; Joshua 24:15.

1. It should be obvious to every thinking person that life is full of choices. We make choices almost every minute of every day.
2. But, many of those choices are pre-determined by our habits. That saves a lot of mental energy. Imagine if you had to decide anew every morning which shoe goes on which foot; or, how to brush your teeth, etc. So, we develop habits. Habits can be a very good way to preserve mental energy; but, they can also be a terrible evil.
3. Most of the decisions we make are simple and have few implications. However, some have enormous implications. Fortunately, even when we make bad choices, there is forgiveness, redemption, and healing available through our loving heavenly Father. Aren't you glad?
4. Seventh-day Adventists believe that we have free will and free choice. We got that from the Anabaptists. We do not believe that God has chosen even before we were born whether we will be saved or lost. That idea is called *predestination*.
5. God does, however, have plans for us which were laid even before this world was created. Read Ephesians 1:1-4; Titus 1:1-2; and 2 Timothy 1:8-9. These verses suggest that even before our world was made, God chose each one of us in this world to be His. And He made provision for us to be redeemed even when we fall short of His plan for us. But, God does recognize that some will choose against Him.
6. And why is free will or self-determination so important? Read Matthew 22:35-37, and 1 John 4:8,16. The Scriptures tell us plainly that God is love. And His kingdom is based on loving Him and loving our fellow human beings. But, God knows that it is impossible to force love. Love can only be won or earned. The Bible from beginning to end is about how God has reached out to human beings in many and various ways to convince them to do what is best by following His guidance for their lives. Some chose Him; others rejected Him.
7. Wouldn't it be nice if we had a clear way to know which choices are good and which choices are bad? There are several clear steps set out in the Bible for making good choices. (1) Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and James 1:5. These verses suggest we should pray to God to give us guidance. (2) Read Isaiah 1:19 and Matthew 7:24-25. It is always safe to obey God and to listen to His Word. (3) Read Psalm 119:105 and 2 Timothy 3:16. God's Word is the best and safest guide for our lives. It is an inspired lamp for our feet. (4) Read Proverbs 3:5-6 and Isaiah 58:11. We should always keep the Lord in mind with each decision that we make. If we choose His side, we will always be happy with our choices. (5) Read Proverbs 15:22; 24:6. It is always appropriate to get good advice from wise people.
8. So, why is it so hard for us as naturally selfish human beings to give up on our own desires and wishes and accept God's will for our lives even though, thinking seriously, we know that God's plans for us are always better than our plans? And where did those selfish desires and wishes come from? How does Satan get to be such an important influence in our lives?
9. As we all know by experience, choosing good friends is very important. So, how do we know if a friend is a good one? When we see a new friendship developing, do we stop for a moment and ask God if it is a good relationship? There is quite a lot of wise counsel in the book of Proverbs about choosing good friends: Proverbs 12:26; 17:17; 18:24; 22:24-25. Choosing Christian friends is always best. If we want to have good friends, we must be a good friend ourselves. Choosing people with hot, violent tempers is a dangerous plan.

Even the best of us have these unlovely traits; and in selecting friends we should choose those who will not be driven away from us when they learn that we are not perfect. Mutual forbearance is called for. We should love and respect one another notwithstanding the faults and imperfections that we cannot help seeing; for this is the Spirit of Christ. Humility and self-distrust should be cultivated, and a patient tenderness with the faults of others. This will kill out all narrowing selfishness and make us large-hearted and generous.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,\* March 5, 1885, par. 12; *Pastoral Ministry*\* 95.1.

10. Think of the story of David and Jonathan. Imagine growing up as Jonathan whose father was the king of Israel. He felt quite assured that he would be the next king. And yet, he came to understand that David had been chosen by God to take his place. Jonathan did not hold any grudges. He even helped David escape from the wrath of Saul. Do you think you would have made a good Jonathan? Or, a good David? Read 1 Corinthians 15:33. “Bad companions ruin good character.”
11. Of all the friends we choose in a lifetime, the most important choice is the friend that we choose as our spouse. It was so easy for Adam! He had a perfect wife, and she was the only choice around. But, the choice is not nearly so easy for us. However, God has not left us without guidance. Choosing a good Christian spouse is the most important decision we make in our lives after choosing to follow the Lord and being a good Christian ourselves.
12. It would be impossible for God to give us specific guidance for choosing the right spouse by naming that person in the Bible. But, He does give some general guidance. Read Psalm 37:27; 119:97; and James 1:23-25.
13. And we must remember that if we are looking for a wonderful spouse, we must practice being a wonderful spouse ourselves. (Matthew 7:12)
14. In Romans 2, Paul has some very blunt words for those who hasten to criticize others. Very often, when we criticize someone for doing something wrong, it is because we are very familiar with doing that wrong thing ourselves.
15. Have you ever wished for certain characteristics in your spouse when, in fact, you lack those characteristics yourself? Do we love our spouses enough so that all through our lives we seek to find ways to make them happier?
16. Another very important choice we make is our choice of a career. A relatively small number of people have the privilege of staying home and guiding the lives of their children to become noble Christians. That is the best profession of all. But, others of us must reach out into the community and earn a living. So, what kind of guidance can we get from God to show us what our future career should be? There is no verse in the Bible that specifically tells us if we should be a farmer or a doctor, for example. Is it safe to take an examination that professes to give us guidance about what career to choose? It might help.
17. Think of the example of Solomon. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. While in his early life, Solomon did many wonderful and noble things; the greatest was building that magnificent temple. But, later in life, he deteriorated into looking mostly for entertainment and pleasure. His conclusion: It didn't mean a thing, it was like chasing the wind—of no use at all!
18. But, in our day, when it is so easy to tune in to almost any kind of entertainment, how many of us make Solomon's mistake? First Timothy 6:10 tells us that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. But, one does not have to be rich to love money. How many children or even spouses would have been very happy with a humbler lifestyle instead of having their father and spouse gone so much of the time? In the beginning, God chose husbands and wives to work together in a beautiful setting. Would that were always possible in our day.

When their lives are near the end, how many people have wished that they had spent more time in the office and less time with their family? What is your conclusion?

19. But, every important decision requires thinking. And we need to remember that free will is just that, really free. No matter how much pressure may be brought upon us from within or from without, we can never be forced to do what is wrong unless we agree. Think of the story of Jacob and his 12 sons. He had been favored by his mother while his brother Esau was favored by his father. Then, he made the mistake of favoring Joseph over all his other sons. As a result, his brothers did that terrible deed of selling Joseph into slavery in Egypt. None of them could possibly have guessed that the story would end the way it did.
20. And think of the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram recorded in Numbers 16:1-35. Review the story. When things did not go the way they thought they should, they challenged Moses and Aaron. And what was the result? All three plus their followers and the families of Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up by the earth! But, Korah's family did not rebel; they lived.
21. Look at the story of Daniel recorded in Daniel 6. The people who opposed Daniel became very jealous because he worked so hard and was favored by the king. In the end, they got what they deserved!
22. What free choices have you made recently? What do those choices tell you about yourself and your relationship with God and with others? Have you recently made some choices that you already regret?
23. Think of the Bible stories that you know. What Bible characters made bad choices? What were the implications? What resulted?
24. What would you say if a friend came to see you and asked advice about getting married? Would you be capable of giving good advice?
25. How do choices become habits? How are bad habits formed? Why are they so hard to get rid of? Remember that Jesus never had to deal with a bad habit because He never developed any! Does that mean that He did not have to face some of the problems that you have to face?
26. Would you agree that the gift of free choice is the most important gift that God has given us? Do you sometimes wish that you were not quite so free? Would you be willing to give up your freedom in order to have a guaranteed place in heaven? How do you think God would respond if you asked for that favor?
27. Love is the very centerpiece of God's government. But, love is not simple. See the handout on *love* at the end of this lesson.

Our God is a God of revelation (and patience). He communicates with us through nature (*Ps. 19:1-3, Rom. 1:20*), prayer (*Matt. 21:22, James 1:5*), Scripture (*Ps. 119:105, 2 Tim. 3:16*), godly counselors (*Prov. 11:14, 15:22*), and, most gloriously, through the life and words of Jesus (*Heb. 1:2, 3*). These are our lights in the world. We really shouldn't be making significant choices without consulting them—especially in the areas this lesson highlights: (1) choosing friends, (2) choosing a life partner, and (3) choosing a life occupation.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 26. [Italic type is in the source.]

28. Do we think of these guiding principles before we make important decisions?
29. Is it true that we are who we are because of our choices? Of course, we recognize that other people's choices have affected us; we, in turn, have affected others by our choices. Do we always think carefully about the ramifications of our choices? What kind of choices are we making when we choose to watch television or a movie? Do we carefully evaluate what kind

of influence that presentation is going to have on us before we watch it? Is it even possible to do that? Do we spend more time watching movies? Or, studying the Bible?

30. Do we have a carefully thought out and reasonable ethical framework for the decisions that we make? Why is it that convenience, cultural trends, peer pressure, emotions, habits, and mere preferences are unreliable guides for the choices that lead to the life that God intended for us?
31. God's plan for each of us is to grow into His image. See Genesis 1:27 and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*\* 555.1.
32. Do we carefully evaluate everything that enters our five senses each day? Do we think about what impact they will have on us? There is an apocryphal story told about the great sculptor Michelangelo. When he made that famous statue of David, he was asked: "How did you create such a masterpiece from a rough chunk of marble?" It is said that Michelangelo responded: "I simply chipped away everything that didn't look like David." Could we form lives like God by chipping away everything that does not reflect the character of God?
33. A Christian ethicist has suggested that there are three bases on which we can make wise decisions: (1) Principles, (2) Rules of action, and (3) Normative models. Principles should be grounded on solid Scripture. See, for example, the Ten Commandments, the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, the Gospels (especially the Sermon on the Mount), and the Epistles. If we study those passages carefully and adopt what they say, wouldn't that protect us most of the time?
34. Then, there are rules for taking action. God gave specific guidance to people like Gideon, (Judges 6:25-26) the rich young ruler, (Matthew 19:21) and even Peter when he struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. (Matthew 26:51-52) We may not be in exactly the same situation that those men were in; but, their stories and others in the Bible give us good general guidance for things like worship, idolatry, finances, priorities, and violence.
35. **Normative models:** Think of all the Bible stories with which you are familiar. What lessons can you learn from them? How often would we find that a Bible story might give us fairly specific guidance in a particular situation?
36. As recorded in Scripture, it was often necessary for God to discipline His children. God may have to discipline us in one way or another. But, if He is a true Father, isn't that His responsibility? Does God more often discipline by circumstances? Or, by taking direct action against us? Read Hebrews 12:5-8; Revelation 3:19; John 10:10; and Luke 18:30.
37. Do we live as if we believed that God's discipline is always for our best good? Do we ever get discipline from Satan? What would that be like? Does Satan ever suggest that we are being forced to give up that "sinful pleasure"?
38. Another important normative model might be the example of Isaac. He was told not to choose a woman from among those living around him. (Genesis 24:6) He trusted others to make wise choices even on his behalf. (Genesis 24:1-4) But, he also spent considerable time meditating and praying about the results. (Genesis 24:63) And fortunately, it seemed that it all worked for the best. Imagine sending someone off to bring back a wife for you from far away!
39. Who were the women that Isaac was exposed to in Canaan? Abraham had literally thousands of people working for him. Wouldn't they be mainly the ones that Isaac would have been exposed to and, thus, have chosen a wife?

# “Love”

**1 John 4:8,16:** “... God is love,...”

**Matthew 22:36-40:** <sup>36</sup> “Teacher,” he asked, “which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup> Jesus answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and the most important commandment. <sup>39</sup> The second most important commandment is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Matthew 22:36–40). New York: American Bible Society.

It sounds so profound and yet so simple! *Love* is probably the word that has come to be associated with Christianity more than any other. But, is it really that simple? Follow me as we consider the following information for a few minutes.

**What God wants most of all in His universe is to have loving, understanding friends.** But, love is much more than just a warm, fuzzy emotional response. Think of the implications of this simple concept!

In order to be able to love, one must also be able to hate. Otherwise, love has no meaning. God wants much more than mere robots. Suppose you took a digital recorder, pressed the record button, and spoke clearly into the microphone the following words: “I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you....” for as long as you wanted. If you then should press the play button, would you be delighted to know that the recorder was saying, “I love you”? Would you give the recorder a big hug for such a wonderful expression of appreciation and love? Of course not. You would think that the whole exercise was a bit silly because the recorder has no control over what it says; it only repeats what you tell it.

**So, in order for God to have creatures that truly love Him, He had to create them with freedom of choice.** This, in turn, implies a lot of other things. Let us consider.

If God wants real love and at the same time grants real freedom, then He must give us a basis on which to build that love. In essence, He must truly love us if He wants a love response in return. He will, in effect, have to “win” our love. But, how does He do that if someone is truly free?

**To be really free, one must have choices.** Choices are not the same as chances. Sometimes, children play a game in which they put something valuable or desirable in one hand and then put both hands behind their back. After a moment or two, during which they may or may not have moved the object from one hand to the other, they bring both hands out for you to choose which one you want. Now, if the item is large enough or irregularly shaped enough, you may get a clue by the appearance of the hands themselves. But, for the moment, let us assume that you have no idea which hand contains the item. When you choose one hand or the other, you are playing a chance game. God does not play chance games. If salvation were based on chance, then we are truly dealing with an arbitrary, capricious God who just enjoys entertaining Himself with our foolish activities.

**In order for God to give us real freedom, He must give us real choices.** That means that we not only must be able to see what we are choosing, but also that **we must have some idea of the implications of that choice** down the line. If you make a choice because something looks good or feels good but you have no idea whether you are getting a deadly weapon or a child’s toy, it is really nothing more than chance. In order to have a real choice,

you must know what the item is and have some idea about the future implications of choosing it. Furthermore, if we lived in a universe that was completely chaotic so that a choice that appeared good today would turn out to be deadly tomorrow, again, any real freedom would be gone. God wants to fellowship with us each Sabbath and help us learn what is best for us.

**So, in order to make real love possible, God had to create an orderly universe in which choices that are good today are still good tomorrow.** We would have to be able to study reality at least long enough during one lifetime so that we could get a reasonably good idea what the results of each of our choices was going to be. But, think of the implications of this! We would need to have a universe that is orderly enough so that science would be possible. “Laws” would describe the way things work.

In allowing us freedom, God recognized that, sooner or later, someone might choose to work against His plan. Then, He would have to deal with the problems that arose. As we know historically, Lucifer, the leader of the angels, was the one who rebelled. (Revelation 12:4a,7-12) He, in turn, convinced one-third of the angels and our first parents to join him in that rebellion. (Genesis 3:1-19) Thus, our world became the testing ground for the “great controversy.” God, no doubt, wished that He could prevent all evil consequences from befalling any of His children; but, in order to have an atmosphere of love, God knew that He would have to stand back and allow things to take their course. God certainly has and had the power to step in at any moment and prevent anyone from sinning or even prevent the consequences of anyone’s sins. But, if He did that, He would have had to overrule our freedom.

Instead, **God chose to allow things to take their natural course, with people mostly reaping the consequences of their own actions and those of their forefathers.** God would only step into human history to exercise His power when it was absolutely necessary to preserve the human race or to prevent them from losing contact with Him.

And so, we read the record of the Old Testament. God had to allow things to go from bad to worse according to human choices until, finally, at the time of the flood, things had become so bad that God was about to lose contact completely with the human race. Many things still needed to be demonstrated. So, God Himself drowned all of His children except eight.

And so, the story went on for thousands of years. Now, it is our turn to live on this earth. And **God is preserving a complete record of everything that is being thought, said, and done here on planet earth as a permanent protection against such a thing ever happening again.** See Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889, par. 4; *SDABC*, vol. 5, 1132.9.

A million or even a billion years into eternity as we are living in complete harmony and peace together, someone may again decide to rebel. God will only need to pull out the “videotape” or “DVD” of the history of this world from the divine museum to remind everyone what the consequences of such a decision would be. God only needs to let “sin” happen once.

**Our little planet is—and will forever be—the lesson book of the universe.** God has declared that love is the best, even the only way, to run a universe. The Devil, and this earth, are in the midst of an experiment to try to prove that God is wrong. We may choose which side of this whole “great controversy” we are going to be on. But, as we decide, let us remember that the consequences and implications of each choice are far from simple!

© 2019, *Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged.* \*Electronic version. [Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last Modified: March 15, 2019

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\Family\SS-2-Family-2019\_04\_13-Fin+.wpd