



Big Stride
Devotional

DECIDE

"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps." - Proverbs 16:9



Decisions, decisions, decisions ... making a decision can sometimes feel quite overwhelming. On occasions, there are just too many options to choose from. I enjoy eating out with family, though more often than not when the waiter comes to take our order we inevitably have to ask for "a couple more minutes" as there is too much choice on the menu.

Sometimes, the options are less, however the significance of the decision needing to be made has implications that are much more important. A year ago, I was admitted to hospital with stomach pains. After tests, the doctors diagnosed an issue with my intestine that would require anti-biotics to treat the infection. Whilst it was not serious and did not require surgery, the consultant informed me that it was a condition that would not go away and could flare up again anytime in the future. Thankfully, I was told there were things I could do to limit the chances of this happening and key to this was a change of diet and regular exercise. The choice was simple: do what the doctor said and minimise the chances of a flare up of the condition or carry on and risk being hospitalised again and the possibility of needing major surgery to deal with the issue. I had to decide.

Making decisions can be hard and often we can fall into the trap of indecision. Roger Dean Duncan observes that "... indecision is a decision. Putting issues 'on hold' is seductive and deceptive. Problems don't disappear. Challenges don't mysteriously vanish. As time passes, in fact, the list of options is often the only thing that shrinks."

So, how are you when it comes to making decisions? What are the decisions you are needing to make at this point in time? The American author and church leader, Andy Stanley, suggests five questions we ask ourselves to help us make better decisions:

- 1) The Integrity Question - "Why am I doing this?"
- 2) The Legacy Question - "What story do I want to tell?"
- 3) The Conscience Question - "What is my conscience telling me?"
- 4) The Maturity Question - "What is the wise thing to do?"
- 5) The Relationship Question - "What does love require of me?"

Stanley notes, "Generally speaking, it is God's will that everyone be honest with themselves . . . really. It's God's will that we all pay attention to anything that dings our consciences. It's God's will for each of us to take into account our past experiences, current circumstances, and future hopes and dreams. It's God's will that we understand what love requires of us."

Finally, as followers of Christ when needing to make decisions we should listen for spiritual direction. Proverbs 16:9 says this: we can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps. Each of us can feel prompted by the Holy Spirit to make a decision. It's quite true, decisions, decisions, decisions are an everyday issue we have to face, but that doesn't mean we have to be indecisive.

- What decisions do you need to make today?
- What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to decide?

Be honest with yourself. Every single decision may become a permanent part of the story of your life - what do you want it to tell? Listen to your conscience. What is the wise thing to do, not necessarily what seems right. Listen for God's direction and don't let indecision knock you off track!

How many times have you heard someone boldly declare that they “have made a decision!” to do something new or drastic. The statement is made with such great intention and yet as the saying goes ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’. Decisions are often easier to announce than they are to make a reality.

When I experienced health issues, it was clear what had to be done and so I decided to move to a different diet and get active. Wholegrain cereal, bread and pasta became part of the weekly shopping list, as did more fruit, vegetables and pulses. New recipes were enjoyable and the diet was quickly changed for good. Inspired by others, I also decided to take up the challenge of running each week to get active. I sought the advice of other runners and made sure I purchased a quality pair of running shoes, the correct clothing and a suitable holder for my phone so I had something to listen to. For the next six months they remained in the wardrobe and it seemed the only decision I had made was to purchase the right gear! Doing was a different matter, and ‘tomorrow’ seemed to be a good response.

Scott Hubbard sums up the actions of many of us when he says, “With a simple wave of tomorrow, dirty dishes seem to vanish, hard conversations disappear, emails hide, and house projects stand by patiently. How wonderful it can feel to send today’s undesirables into the fog of tomorrow — and how ready tomorrow is to receive them! Yes, we could take care of such responsibilities today, but why when there’s always tomorrow?”

In 1987, Nike launched its first major TV campaign and the advertising company executive responsible for producing the campaign for Nike felt that they needed a tagline to give some unity to the work, one that spoke to the hardest hardcore athletes as well as those talking up a morning walk. Nike executives were not convinced it was necessary, however the tagline “Just Do It” was added to the campaign. The response was definitive and for some reason that line resonated deeply in the athletic community and just as deeply with people who had little or no connection to sports. So much so, it remains Nike’s philosophy today.

What are the things we have decided and know we have to do and yet for various reasons we have not yet got to the stage of just doing? If I am going to be a runner, then I am going to have to put on the shoes and put one foot in front of the other. That’s the same with personal and spiritual development. So why do we not ‘just do it’? Often, it’s because we feel like we just don’t have what it takes today, or we don’t feel motivated today, or we don’t sense an inner spark for creative work today.

The well known theologian JI Packer, said that we are to “expect help from God in each day’s trouble, strength from God for obedience in each day’s tasks”. For Packer our expectations of being helped is used by the Spirit to give us energy to ‘keep on keeping on’ in the routines of every day, or in other words to ‘just do’ what we have decided to do.

- Are you doing what you have decided to do?
- What are you putting off doing? What is making you put off these things?

Ask yourself - “What does God want me to do?” Don’t make excuses, start today, face your fears and focus on what you gain!



DO

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord”
- Colossians 3:23

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”
- Philippians 4:13



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DEDICATE



"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." – Jeremiah 29:13

About 10 weeks ago I made a momentous decision to start the Couch to 5K programme. I recorded my first run on my Facebook page. Here's what I wrote:

"Tonight is a momentous occasion. I finally used my trainers for the purpose they were bought – I did the first run of the Couch to 5K. I am not telling you this for accountability. I am rubbish at keeping to things like this and I am already not looking forward to the next run which is on Wednesday. I am telling you this because I am proud of myself for doing this and for finally taking the step (or very slow jog). I have downloaded this C25K app so many times – I may still remove it again! But tonight, I am celebrating this tiny victory to some, but massive victory to me!"

I said that I wasn't posting it for accountability, but rather just to say that I'd started, because that in itself was massive for me. I also think I said it because I wanted a 'get out' clause just in case I didn't manage to finish the programme! I know what I'm like – I'm good at starting things but can easily lose momentum and give up – especially for anything exercise related. For that very reason I think I did subconsciously post it on Facebook for the accountability. I really wanted to be fully dedicated to it. I really wanted to be able to post an update every week to say that I had completed another week of the programme. The further I got into it, the more I was dedicated to it and determined to finish the course. And since finishing the programme, I'm dedicated to keep running because I don't want all the effort I have made to be wasted and because I want to better myself. I want to feel fitter; I want to sleep better. Since finishing the programme, I have managed to run 5k in 44 minutes and each time since then I've dedicated to try to get that time down, and you know what? I have already managed to take 2 minutes off that original time.

Every athlete understands the concept of dedication. It's that "all in" mentality of pursuing a goal with everything you have. You commit the time and make sacrifices to make it happen and I've experienced a glimpse of that in these past 10 weeks. Even outside the world of sports, we're all dedicated to something. It could be a relationship, a job, a cause, a goal or an idea. Whatever it is, our dedication is reflected in how we manage our time, our resources, and in what we watch or read.

As a Christian my goal every day is to be totally dedicated to the things God is dedicated to. Through time spent reading His Word and connecting with Him in prayer, I know I can be focused on loving and serving others and getting to know God in deeper and more intimate ways. Jeremiah 29:13 says: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." – Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV) That's the kind of dedication I want to have in my relationship with God.

And through this dedicated relationship with Him, all other commitments in life are transformed. Everything you do, say and see will be done through a different worldview and you'll see things as Christ sees them.

- So what are you most dedicated to in your life?
- How does your dedication to Christ impact all other areas of your life?
- Are there ways in which you can be more dedicated?

Heavenly Father, You know my heart and my every thought. You know in what and in whom my deepest dedication lies. I pray that through Your power, I would throw aside anything keeping me from pursuing You with everything I have. Give me the eyes to see this world as You see it, that I may be completely changed from the inside out. Amen.