

CHAPTER 1

It's Time to Make a Choice

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.

Deuteronomy 30:19

God has a good plan for our lives, but the devil also has a plan, and it is *not* a good one. The apostle John explained this simply, saying, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). God’s plan is received through placing our faith in what He has said to us in His Word, and the devil’s plan is received through believing his lies. The devil is a liar; he is the father of lies and the truth is not in him (John 8:44).

God has given us free will, which means we can do what we want to do. We have choices, and each one we make brings a result. God said in Deuteronomy 30:19 that He gives us two choices: life or death, blessing or curse. Then He even told us which one to choose. He said to choose life, “so that you and your children may live.” Even though He told us which one to choose, He still requires us to make the choice. God’s good plan for our lives won’t just automatically happen and neither will the devil’s evil plan. We must choose one or the other.

You might think, *Surely nobody would intentionally choose the devil's evil plan for their life.* But people do choose his plan through a lack of knowledge regarding him and his evil ways. The prophet Hosea said that God's people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). My purpose in writing this book is to help you gain knowledge about fear, how fear works in your life, and how to break free from it so you cannot be deceived.

We make one big choice when we decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord; then we spend our lives making daily choices that line up with God's Word. When we are in a tense situation at work, we can choose to tell the truth instead of a lie. When a clerk doesn't charge us enough for a certain purchase, it is up to us to do the right thing and make them aware that we owe more money instead of keeping quiet and considering ourselves lucky.

If I were to ask you to guess who tempts you to lie or keep quiet about a work situation, I'm pretty sure you would know the answer. Likewise, if I asked who suggested that you tell the truth and speak up about owing more money, I am sure you know the correct answer to that also. But in both cases you would have to choose what you would do. If you make right choices according to God's will, you experience blessing. But if you choose what you know is wrong, you will face consequences you won't like or enjoy.

Living the Good Life

The apostle Paul wrote:

For we are God's [own] handiwork (His workmanship),
recreated in Christ Jesus, [born anew] that we may do

those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us [taking paths which He prepared ahead of time], that we should walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live].

Ephesians 2:10 AMPC

We might read these words and think, *Everybody will choose the good life*, but sadly, there are more who don't choose it than those who do. Why? Because the devil lies to them and makes them think they can make wrong choices and still have right results. He convinces them that they will be the lucky ones who won't experience problems because of bad choices.

The Bible says that our sin always finds us out and that the result of sin is death (Num. 32:23; Rom. 6:23). This "death" is not always the cessation of life. More often, it is the loss of peace, joy, and a life worth living. We can always repent of our sin, receive God's complete forgiveness, and go on to live good lives, but there are times we may still have to bear the consequences of our wrong actions. A person may commit murder and God will forgive him if he truly repents. His family and even the family of the person he killed may forgive him, but he will still have to go to prison. It is important for us to realize that our actions carry consequences.

Notice also that Ephesians 2:10 tells us that God arranges a good life for us, but we must walk in it. We have to choose God's ways. He is always drawing us toward His will, and His grace is always present to enable us to do the right thing, but once again let me be clear that God won't force us to do what is right. We are partners with God in our lives. We *cannot* do His part, and He *will not* do our part. He sets before us life and death, good and evil. The choice is ours.

Whether we walk in faith or fear is a decision we must make many times throughout our lives. I don't think it would be a stretch to say we may need to make that choice daily.

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My father was an abusive man who controlled his family through fear. It was actually the devil working through him, but he made choices about how he would live, and he had to bear the consequences of those choices in his life. Although he repented and received Jesus at the age of eighty-three, he lived a miserable life for eighty-three years and died when he was eighty-six. I'm glad to know he is in heaven, but what he did had a lasting impact on a lot of people. It is good for us to remember that our choices affect the people around us as well as our own lives.

My mother was ruled by fear, and because of her refusal to confront her fear, both my brother and I suffered. My father sexually abused me, and my mother knew he was doing it, but fear was so strong in her life that she ignored the truth and eventually had mental problems as a result of the deeply rooted guilt and shame she felt.

When my mother was in her seventies, she apologized to me for what she let my father do. She explained to me that she simply could not face the scandal and was afraid she couldn't take care of my brother and me by herself. As you can see, her decisions were based on fear, and all of us suffered because of that, including her.

If you are allowing fear to rule your decisions, you are missing the good life God has planned for you, and there is a strong possibility that your fear is adversely affecting other people in your life, too. It is time to make the choice to let God help you break free from fear.

Although you may have been ruled by fear in the past, you can choose today to confront fear and become the courageous person God wants you to be. It is not too late. It is never too late to do the right thing.

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Choose Faith

I have heard that when fear knocks on our door, we should send faith to answer. We can conquer fear, but only with faith. When the devil tells us, "You can't," we should remember that God tells us, "You can." Even though we may feel fear, we can move forward in faith.

When Peter saw Jesus walking on water and wanted to do the same, he got out of the boat and began taking steps. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he did indeed walk on water, but when he began to look at the storm and the raging waves around him, he grew frightened and started to sink. Jesus reached out and saved him, but He also lovingly rebuked him for his fear, asking him why he had such little faith and so much doubt (Matt. 14:25–31).

God never stops loving us and doesn't even become angry with us because we choose fear, but it does make Him sad because He wants us to live the best life we can live. He sent Jesus so we could have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

God Prepares Us for What He Has Planned for Us

After God called me to teach His Word, I needed a lot of time to study. In that season of my life, I had a husband and three children and certainly couldn't leave all my responsibilities and go to

Bible college. I also had a full-time job. So I studied as much as I could, but I simply did not have enough time to study as much as I needed to. I was teaching a small Bible study group each Tuesday evening at our home, but God had bigger plans, and I needed time to prepare for what He had planned for me.

I sensed very strongly that God wanted me to quit my job so I could have time at home to study several hours every day, but there was a problem. Had I quit my job, we wouldn't have had enough money to pay our monthly bills, and we definitely would not have had money for emergencies or extra things.

I finally tried to bargain with God: I quit my full-time job and took a part-time job. After only a short time, I got fired. I had always been a good employee—certainly not the type to be fired—but the office manager disliked me from the moment I took the job, and no matter what I did, it wasn't right. When I was fired, it was evident to me that God told me to “quit” my job, not to get a part-time job.

Partial obedience is not faith. It is a little faith mixed with a lot of fear and self-reliance, and it doesn't work. I was afraid we wouldn't have enough without my income, so even though I wanted to be obedient to God, I wanted a backup plan just in case we didn't get the miracle we needed each month.

This same scenario is not uncommon and many people try to do what I did—only under different circumstances. In 1 Samuel

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13 and 15 we see two instances when King Saul tried partial obedience and ended up losing his kingdom because of it. Each time he offered excuses that sounded good,

but God expects us to obey Him, not offer excuses for why we didn't obey Him.

One instance of Saul's disobedience was due to fear (1 Samuel 13:1–14), and the other was the result of greed (1 Samuel 15:1–23). Let's be very careful not to make excuses for our disobedience. An excuse may sound plausible to us, but God will not accept it.

If you send your teenagers to the store to get milk and they come back with orange juice, they have disobeyed you. They may reason that orange juice is still something to drink and might even offer you the excuse that they got it because it was on sale. But the point is that they did not do what you asked them to do.

When God is preparing us for something big that He wants us to do, He allows us to go through many tests of obedience. Some may seem insignificant to us, but they are as important as anything we might consider big. If we cannot be trusted in little things, we will never be made ruler over bigger things (Matt. 25:21, 23).

After losing my part-time job, I did what God asked me to do and quit working outside the home altogether. I was very fearful concerning finances because each month we needed a miracle to pay our bills in full and have provision for anything extra that came up. Each month, we were around forty dollars short of having enough to pay the bills, but learning how to trust God for that small amount helped prepare us to trust God for the large amounts we need now to support the work He allows us to do around the world. I will never forget how amazing it was to watch God provide for us each month. He did it in a variety of ways and never left us without what we needed.

When I quit my job, I made the right choice, but had I made a wrong choice, my life would be very different than how it is now. What kind of choices are you making in your life right now? Are

they choices to obey God, to choose life and blessing? Are they choices you will be happy with later on? I pray you are making right choices and that if you haven't been in the past, today will be a new beginning for you. Choose faith, not fear. It is never too late for a new beginning with God.

When you are afraid, do the thing you are afraid of and soon you will lose your fear of it.

Norman Vincent Peale

Doing It Afraid at Sixty Years Old

Never in my nearly sixty years did I think I would ever learn to swim. I didn't really think it mattered anymore. When I was young, maybe. But I wasn't a child any longer. I didn't plan to swim the English Channel or compete in the Olympics, so why would I want to learn to swim? And why, then, was I getting the nagging impression that I needed to learn?

Now, I know swimming is not a problem for many people. It's great exercise. It's exhilarating, they say. And it's fun. But for me, it was terrifying! And at the time, I thought it always would be. Water was my phobia.

When I reflect on how my fear of water started, I immediately remember the tragic drowning of my childhood friend. I can still hear his mother's scream piercing through our open windows that summer night. Even now, it saddens my heart to think how water took my friend from me. Then a few years later, my sister's classmate drowned during a swimming class at school. I'll never forget the broken expression on her coach's face at the wake. Indescribable. I could only conclude that water was bad and, other than for a bath, there would never be a reason for me to be in it.

But it slowly began to dawn on me that God was speaking. It was time to confront more than just my fear of swimming and face fear itself! I instinctively knew that this issue was bigger than I thought. Fear had stifled too much of my life. One day I shared what was on my heart with some coworkers, and then I knew I had to follow through. So, I joined the YMCA and signed up for beginners' classes.

It was just as I suspected. God was up to something in my life. As I timidly progressed through each lesson—and did it afraid—I experienced His presence and peace in a profound way. As I was learning to swim, I was also learning to trust on a whole new level.

Swimming is a lifetime achievement for me, literally. Not only is it great exercise, it is really exhilarating. And more than anything, it's fun. But the most outstanding accomplishment for me has been learning to trust God on a more personal level, in the deep, so to speak. Knowing He is with me in every situation I face, I don't dread what's ahead, because whatever comes, I know He will guide me through it. After all, God set me free from the fear and helped me learn to swim. It is never too late to do it afraid.

—Carolyn