

Week 1 – The most important decision in your life

Day 1 – Choosing God

You stand at a road junction. To continue you have to either turn to the left or to the right. You have to make a decision. Depending on your decision you will arrive at a different place and, even if you don't turn to the left or the right, you are making a decision, because you just stand still at the road junction. The same happens throughout our life's journey. Over and over again we have to face decisions.

Tick the decisions you have already made in your life:

- Where shall I spend my holidays next year?
- What car shall I buy?
- What will my job be?
- Whom shall I marry?
- In what country / region do I live?
- What is my religion / who do I believe in?
- _____
- _____



Which is the most important decision for you? Rank the decisions you have marked by writing a number behind each in the order of their importance for you. If we have a look at the Bible it immediately becomes clear: the most important decision you have made in your life is not the decision for the right spouse, the most economic flat, the best job or the coolest car. NO! It is the decision to live for God.

What does it mean when you decide to live for God?

This means, that we decide to live our lives according to the directives and standards of God. That is, not in the way I want but in the way God wants!

Read John 14:6-9

God's Word shows us that this decision has to do with a person: It is the deliberate decision to follow Jesus Christ, God's Son!

John 14:6-9 makes clear that all that Jesus did and does for us fully corresponds to God's will. He became human to show us how the Father is and what is on God's heart.

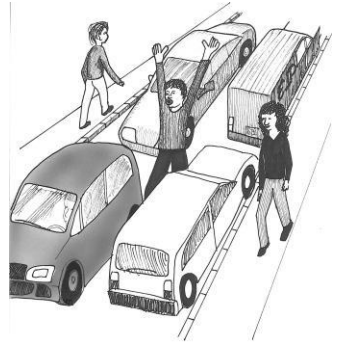
In the same way it is also evident that Jesus is the only way that leads to God.
(Read John 14:6 again)

Jesus amplifies this fact in the original language of the New Testament. The literal translation of this verse is: *I, I am the way, the truth and the life!* Jesus doesn't say that he is a way, but the way to God. In this respect there is no alternative to or escape from this truth.

In Matthew 12:30 Jesus says that he who is not with him is against him.

This statement of God's Word may seem strange to us, but it is very logical, if we also take into account His previous statement. Since Jesus is the only way, people have to choose Jesus. The person who says they have nothing against Jesus, but have not consciously sided with him, is not neutral in the light of the Bible.

The following example can help make this clear: When someone walks on the right or the left pavement they will be safe. When they walk in the middle of the road they will risk their lives.



Every decision has consequences

Every decision has consequences. In some cases they are far-reaching, others can hardly be perceived.

Go back to the decisions that you marked before:

What consequences did these decisions have?

Are you happy with the way your decisions have worked out?

Read 1. John 5:12

This passage shows clearly that a decision to follow Christ has consequences too. Those who have him, i.e. those who have made a decision to follow Jesus, also have the divine life promised by the Bible.

God's Word not only refers to physical life, but speaks of a divine quality of life – a completely satisfying and fulfilling life. Everybody is looking for this quality of life. They attempt to arrange their life so it is satisfactory, but in the end they do not succeed, because the essence is missing, the relationship with God, the source of life.

Have you already decided to follow Jesus?

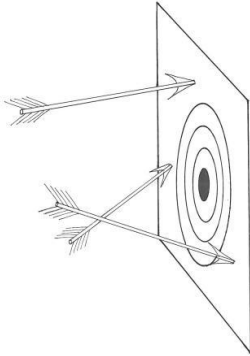
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Day 2 – Missing the goal

Yesterday we spoke about God being the fountain of life and that our decision to follow Him brings us life and the quality of life everybody yearns for.

Why are we missing this relationship with God in the first place?

Sin – an old word, but a contemporary problem!



The reason for this missing relationship is called sin in God's Word. Nowadays, society has little use for the concept of sin; therefore we will try to explain what God means when he speaks of sin.

The literal translation of sin is "missing the goal". A sinner is therefore someone who has not reached a specified goal. In our context the missed goals are God's directives and guidelines, which we, as humans may even attempt to reach, but continually notice that we can not.

Sin does not only imply "missing the goal", but also separation. Sin is completely destructive; it separates us from God and His life.

Read Genesis 3.

In Genesis 3:1-24 we clearly see the effect sin (missing the goal) had in man's life:

- A. Sin begins when you believe the lies of the devil more than the Words of God's.
- B. The decision to sin is a conscious, voluntary and individual choice – nobody is being sinned!
- C. Sin leads to shame; you try to hide the consequences of sin.
- D. Sin leads to estrangement from God; you try to hide from Him.
- E. Sin severs the close relationship between God the Creator and you.
- F. Sin gives birth to fear.
- G. Sin has consequences (punishment).

Write down the number of the corresponding verses of Genesis 3 behind the consequences A - G.

Solution:

A: verses 1-2 / B: verse 6 / C: verse 7 / D: verse 8 / E: verse 9 / F: verse 10 / G: verses 14-24

Note: God's first words are: „Where are you?“ and not: „What have you done?“ From these words alone we realise the destructive power of sin. God and man were separated.

God's Word calls this separation spiritual death. We are separated from the fountain of life and therefore, from a spiritual point of view, are dead.

Imprisoned...

Man is caught in this condition of sin. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul explains that we are prisoners to sin; indeed we are slaves to sin. Out of our own strength we cannot break out of sin's grip and escape its influence.



... Set free!

How grateful we can be to God that in His love for us he has prepared a plan for setting us free! Our perspective of sin is discouraging, but at the end of Genesis 3 God gives us a ray of hope:

In Verse 15 and 21 God's way on how to break the power of sin is shown to us. In the middle of listing the consequences God reveals to us that He has prepared a way. God, as a good educator, not only does this with His words, but also through His actions.

In verse 15 God tells us that someone will come who's heel will be struck by the snake, that is the devil, but, who in return will crush the devil's head: He is speaking of Jesus Christ, who carried the punishment for our sins on the cross at Golgotha and who destroyed the power of sin and death through His resurrection.



In verse 21 we then see that God made garments of skin. To get the skin, God had to kill an animal, an animal which was innocent of the transgression of man. What a powerful image of the redemption of Christ: It is not for nothing that the New Testament calls Him God's innocent Lamb who was sacrificed for us.

From this viewpoint we understand why the decision to submit to God is so important. It is a decision for life not death, a decision for liberty not slavery. It is the decision to follow Jesus Christ, which is the only way to the fountain of life!

We realise: My decision to follow Jesus is so important because its significance is eternal. This decision solves the problem of sin and guilt and gives me an answer to the existential questions of life! That's why there is no neutral ground in this matter. Not making a decision is also a decision!

Our culture lables small and large mistakes as sins: somebody eats too much, you tell a white lie, etc. Why does the Bible treat sin in a far more serious light?

After the first two days, can you explain in your own words, why the decision to follow Jesus means life and deciding against following Jesus death?

Why is there no middle ground, no neutral zone?

Week 1 – The most important decision in your life

Day 3 – My decision

Yesterday and the day before, we considered the importance of a relationship with Jesus and how sin destroyed this relationship. Today, tomorrow and the following day we will try to understand what it really means to follow Jesus.

When do I make this important decision?

According to the Bible, the day we decide to lead a life under God's standards is the day we are saved.



What does God's Word mean when it speaks about salvation? The New Testament, originally written in Greek, uses the word *epistrepho*, to describe salvation. The main meaning of the word is: "to dedicate oneself to somebody or something, in order to change his way and content of life in the light of God's demands".

When someone accepts Jesus as Savior, two important things happen or happened:

1. It is a clear turning and total devotion to Jesus Christ.

This means that from this moment on, Jesus Christ becomes the new ruler in my life. No more I, the circumstances, or the realm of darkness will determine the way I live my life.

2. It also means turning away from my old, sinful life.

If Jesus becomes the ruler in my new life that automatically means that the old ruler, the Devil, is dethroned.

If we take a careful look at two passages of the New Testament, we will realise that from a biblical point of view repentance means turning from as well as turning to:

Read Acts 14:15 and 1. Thessalonians 1:9.

According to these two verses from whom or what should I to turn away?

And whom should I turn to?

Solution:

Turning away from idols,
turning to the living and true God

These two verses alone show us clearly that repentance contains two basic steps: to turn away from the old and to turn to the new, to Jesus Christ.

How does this take place, practically?

This question is also answered by a biblical concept which modern society often misunderstands: repentance. Depending on our culture and upbringing, if we hear the word repentance we immediately think that we have to be punished to make restitution. But the biblical concept of repentance does not suggest that we have to do something - Jesus already bore the punishment for our sins.

Repentance means a change in our way of thinking. It is our task to adapt our way of thinking, which is characterised by our old lifestyle, to the way God thinks.

God's Word shows us four important steps of repentance:

1. To recognize sin and guilt (John 16:8-11).
2. To confess our guilt before God and, in certain circumstances, also before people (Proverbs 28:13 / James 5:16).
3. To leave sin (Luke 19:8).
4. To hate sin.



Mark the correct statements with a cross and cross out the incorrect ones:

- Repentance is God's punishment for those who sinned.
- A part of repentance is that I realise and admit my sins.
- Repentance is not a punishment, but sometimes it may be difficult as it demands courage because we feel ashamed of our guilt.
- We actually don't need to repent because Jesus already carried the punishment for our sins.

Solution:

2 and 3 are correct, 1 and 4 are false

The four steps: recognize, confess, leave and hate cannot be emphasised enough. It is important that we understand that all four steps belong together.

Many Christians never go beyond the first two steps and get trapped within the never-ending circle of recognition and confession. This cycle is frustrating. For this reason we have to learn to reach the point where we leave and hate the sin we have already recognized and confessed!

This last point is particularly important. We have to be aware how utterly destructive sin is. Sin was the reason why Jesus had to die on the cross. Jesus died for us; this means that the punishment for sin (missing the goal!) has been paid - the way back to fellowship with God is open again for us.

Right now take some time to pray.

Thank Jesus that He was prepared to die for your sins and the sins of all mankind, although He was the only one who never sinned, the only one who was righteous in God's eyes.

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Day 4 – God’s help in salvation

Where does God come into this process?

We are not alone in repentance or changing the way we think. God himself supports us in this process.

Read the following verses and write them behind the corresponding statements:
John 3:1f // John 6:44 // John 16:8-11 // Romans 2:4

- A. God’s kindness leads us to repentance _____
- B. God works in us through the Holy Spirit _____
- C. The Father draws us to Jesus _____
- D. The Father gives us new life (we are born again) _____

Solution:

A: Romans 2:4, B: John 16:8-11, C: John 6:44, D: John 3:1f

New life, salvation or being born again, terms used in God’s Word, are God’s most precious gift to us. It is God’s response to our repentance, the process of rethinking which we already talked about.

Jesus gives us new birth

What does this new birth that God wants to give us mean?

Firstly it’s necessary to point out that the biblical concept of resurrection cannot be compared with the idea propagated by the oriental religions. It doesn’t mean that people are born over and over again after their death until they are sufficiently prepared to go to heaven. Here the Bible is very clear:

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment... (Hebrews 9:27, ESV)

The new birth – invisible but powerful



When God’s Word speaks about rebirth it does not refer to a natural process, but to a spiritual one. We have already seen that the relationship between God and man was destroyed by sin. In this context it is worth highlighting the command given by God to man:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:16-17, ESV)

A couple of verses later we can see that man did not listen to God’s warning, but that he was still alive. Here too, God’s Word does not refer to a physical death, but to a spiritual one. The moment man

sinned against God, his spirit died. For this reason, his relationship to God stopped working on this level.

In John 4:24 Jesus himself teaches us about God:

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” (ESV)

When the spirit of man is dead it means that he no longer has contact with God. In a way, the “antenna” that receives the correct programme is missing. That’s why the New Testament repeats over and over again that people who live in sin are seen as dead by God.

Once a person decides to give his life to God and to repent he can experience how God gives him a new life; he will be reborn into real life.

Read John 3:3+5

Is it possible that a person who takes pains to lead a good life and keeps God’s Commandments can enter God’s Kingdom without being born again?

YES NO

Here Jesus points out to a very religious man called Nicodemus that, without being born again, no-one can see the kingdom of God, much less enter it.

To sum up we can say:

The decision to give your life to God has two sides:

1. The human side

You have to decide that you want to live with God. The steps contained in this decision have already been discussed on day 3 of this week.

2. The divine side

God does preliminary work; he acts in the heart of every person through the Holy Spirit and leads them to a decision.

If you have made a decision God gives you New Life through rebirth. Because of this divine action man is able to live in a sincere and close relationship with God again.

This rebirth is a sovereign act of God in you, a gift of God’s mercy, which allows you to make a new start and to live your life under God’s authority as part of God’s Kingdom.

We realise that God the Father has a deep desire to restore the original fellowship and relationship with you. he looks for us and waits longingly that we find and take the way back to His heart.



Week 1 – The most important decision in your life

Day 5 – An example

At the end of the first week, in which we had a look at the central truths related to the most important decision of your life, we are going to look at a typical example of repentance.

Read Luke 15:11-32

Jesus tells us about the parable known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. If we carefully read what Jesus says, we find out that in reality the story is about two lost sons. Both need to return to their father.

In this parable we see the important truths we have discovered this week.

- A. The decision to oppose God _____
- B. Realisation of sin (missing the goal) _____
- C. Confession and renouncing of sin _____
- D. The reaction of the father to the repentance of the son _____
- E. The reaction of the second “lost” son _____

In the blanks behind the points A – E write down the verse numbers from Luke 15 corresponding to the themes

Solution:

A: verses 12-14 // B: verse 17 // C: verses 18-20a // D: verses 20b-24 // E: verses 25-32

The act of repentance and the process of repentance: God appeals to us to make the most important decision in life: the decision to live with him.



The Parable of Luke 15 shows us that the process of repentance never ends completely. Although the older son lived in the same house as the father, which means that he was very close to him physically, he was in actual fact estranged from his father.

While reading through the lesson you might have noticed that you need to make this important decision to live with God.

We encourage you to take this most important step in your life.

Maybe you have already made this fundamental decision but, as the elderly son, you are estranged from the Father: turn back to His heart!

Jesus says about himself in John 10:10: *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (ESV)*

God has prepared everything for us to have this very life. The choice is yours!

Reflections for the end of the week

Congratulations, you have finished the first week of the course Foundations of Faith. Now it is important that you meet with your companion.

Below you'll find some questions that you can discuss together. Think about how you would answer them:

- In this lesson, what is pointed out as the most important decision?
- According to this lesson what is the most important decision in your life, personally?
- What about your decision to live with God? – Do you understand what that means for you? – Have you already made this decision?
- If yes: How did you personally experience both aspects “turning away from” and “turning to”? – What has changed in your life because of this?
- If no: Do you have any questions related to this decision that you want to discuss with your companion?

Ask your companion how he came to that decision and the effect it had in his life.

Putting into practice

What has moved you this week and what will you apply to your everyday life?
