

CHOOSING TO FORGIVE

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15

Every day—and practically every hour of every day—you make choices. And when you say yes to one thing, you are automatically saying no to something else. Even not choosing something is making a choice. So, given that you cannot escape making choices, why not make good choices?

To illustrate how often we make choices without even realizing it, I want you to clasp your hands together and interlock your fingers. Now look down at your hands. Which thumb lies on top? Is it your right thumb or your left? Do you realize that not everyone clasps hands like you just did? At some level—whether you were aware of it or not—you chose which thumb to place on top. And a choice repeated often enough becomes a habit.

Now lace your fingers together so that your other thumb rests on top. Hold it there for a minute. Doesn't that feel awkward? But why should it? Many people clasp their hands exactly like this. But it feels awkward to you because it's not the way you usually do it. It's not your habit.

The same principle holds true with forgiveness. You tend to choose whom to forgive—or not to forgive—based on your previous experience and your interpretation of the wrong that has been done. For example, a person taught that any shading of the truth is a lie will be much more offended when a lie is told than someone who grew up in an environment where it was common to slant the information in order to not hurt feelings. You may not be aware of why you are making these choices to forgive or not forgive, but at some level you are making them.

Wouldn't it be better to make these choices consciously? And wouldn't it be best to make healthy, godly choices?

By the way, just realizing that you have choices is good for your health. When you have choices available that will improve your circumstances, your stress level lowers and your health improves. A Yale University study demonstrated that when residents of nursing homes received extra choices, they suffered fewer illnesses. These extra choices included what they wanted to eat for meals and what kind of social activities they could have. More choices translated to better health.

Consider what author Viktor Frankl observed: “We cannot control what exists, but we can control what we think and believe about what exists.” In terms of our discussion of forgiveness, you can’t control what has happened to you, but you can control the choices you make about forgiving the people involved in those events. The mere recognition that you have choices about whom and when and how you will forgive can improve your life. Then, when you choose to forgive, you put into motion a whole series of events that work together for your ultimate good—for your physical as well as your spiritual health. Just as Joshua chose to serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15), you can choose to follow the ways of the Lord and offer forgiveness to others.

Of course, the choice to forgive implies the choice to not forgive. But why would you do that when the person who most benefits from forgiveness is you?

TAKE TIME TO PONDER

1. You may not feel like forgiving, but you always have the ability to choose forgiveness. To help you make the best choice, list the reasons you do not want to forgive and then list the reasons it would be best to forgive.
2. What choices regarding forgiveness will you make today that could change your life forever?

TAKE TIME TO PRAY

Father, thank You for the gift of choice. Thank You that You did not make us robots with no choices at all. Help me to remember to both value this great gift and use it wisely for Your glory, for the benefit of others, and for my own spiritual and physical health. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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