



Making the

Right
Decisions in Life

*Where do I Go
from Here?*

Nicholas
Comninellis





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WHERE DO I GO



FROM HERE?





CHAPTER ONE

We Must Decide



THE CRISP FALL WEATHER brought many people to the Family Health Center where I worked in Fort Worth, Texas. I'd just finished examining a young pregnant woman who was due any day. Next was a man who had smashed his thumb with a hammer. No broken bones, just a bad bruise. I quickly splinted the thumb, and moved on to the next room.

I opened the door, expecting to encounter another urgent problem. Pete was sitting in a chair; an athletic-looking fellow about 21 years old. "What have you been up to, Pete?" I asked, shaking his hand.

"Doctor Nicholas, I'm about to graduate from college!"

"Oh? This is an exciting time for you!" I replied.

"Well, I'm actually pretty anxious. I need to make some big decisions. I know you've made good ones to get where you are now. I thought maybe you could help me."

I looked at Pete with surprise. This was not the type of request I usually heard at the office. "What sort of decisions?"

"First, there's Heather. She and I have been dating for two years. We are thinking about getting married, but she has another year of school to go."

"Are you sure she's the right one?" I asked.

Pete squirmed. "No, not 100 percent. I need more time."

“So what’s the hurry?”

“For one, I was just offered a chance to teach at Sycamore High School,” ventured Pete. “But that would mean moving 50 miles away from Heather. Teaching jobs are scarce, and I’m really fortunate to have an opportunity.”

“And that would make it hard to be with Heather,” I proposed.

“Exactly. But that’s not all. I’m interested in becoming a veterinarian. . . .” He stood up and began walking around the little room. “But if I’m accepted to vet school, I can’t begin my teaching job because Sycamore wants a three-year commitment.”

“How long do you have to decide?”

“I’ve got just three weeks until the veterinary application deadline. To make things even more complicated, I’m broke. I really can’t afford to go to vet school or get married right now.”

“What about a student loan or scholarship?” I suggested.

“Maybe. But I really don’t want to go into debt. I talked to an Army recruiter yesterday. They would finance my education, but then I would owe them several years.” Pete looked out the window and breathed a sigh. “I really don’t know where to go from here.”

Later in the day I was thinking about Pete. Had I been helpful?

My thoughts turned to my own struggles with decision-making. In college, I was interested in working overseas. At that time, I was considering a move to war-torn Angola to work with a medical team. It was a complex decision. So was Pete’s. His career and marriage plans had reached a crossroads. Which way would he turn? What would I say when he and I met the following week? I pulled out a notebook and began to write.

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

WANTED — A WONDERFUL LIFE

We all want to be successful, to be rewarded, and to feel that our efforts are worthwhile. But each of us must choose how to live. The quality of our lives depends greatly upon these individual decisions.

At various times we're all in Pete's position. We ponder what to study, whom to marry, where to live, with whom to be friends, and which interests to develop. These can lead to tough, even philosophical questions. J. Grant Howard, a university professor, puts a realistic spin on decision-making:

If life can be viewed as a battle, then here is the latest and most appropriate communique: We are completely surrounded and totally outnumbered. That is a realistic progress report from the weary foot soldiers on the front lines of life. Surrounded? Outnumbered? By what?

Options! In the battle of life we are up against options. Everywhere we turn there are choices to be made. Obligations that pressure us. Opportunities that entice us. We are bombarded with places to go, overrun with people to meet, pinned down with things to buy, fatigued with mail to read. We are being inundated on all sides by powerful forces that clamor for our time, talents, money, influence, wisdom. There is also a psychological aspect to this campaign: We are infiltrated by feelings of guilt because we cannot possibly respond to all the options.

At times we are so pummeled with options that we contemplate surrender. We look in vain for a white flag to wave. Gradually, we realize that we are under siege and that the siege lasts a lifetime. We can't surrender. We can't escape. We just keep on fighting. And the fight is carried on by making decisions. Some decisions involve only a minor skirmish;

others are major. When we make the right choice, we win. If it's the wrong choice, we lose. There are no cease-fires, and tomorrow there will be more skirmishes.¹

Time is a resource. We have only a limited supply — about 25,000 days in the average person's life. So how can we best use the time we're allotted? What will we choose? Now is the time to decide!

BAD DECISIONS

Few people deliberately set out to make trouble for themselves. But in spite of good intentions, many make poor choices and pay a bitter price. Consider some examples.

- One young man who blew it was Amnon, a son of King David in ancient Israel (2 Sam. 13). As a prince, he enjoyed much privilege. But he also had a weakness: Amnon lusted for his half-sister, Tamar. He made himself sick with infatuation over her. So Amnon devised a plan. He stayed in bed, pretending to be ill, and asked her to come and visit him. Once they were alone, Amnon grabbed Tamar and forced her into bed with him. She resisted, but the prince was stronger, and he raped her.

Afterward, Tamar wept long and hard. Then Amnon threw her out of his room. Suddenly, his heart had changed completely. He hated her! It wasn't long before Tamar's brother Absalom learned what happened. Furious, he had Amnon executed. Amnon made some bad decisions, and paid for them with his life!

- Phillip had a similar problem. He was 23 and worked in construction. I first met Phillip when he brought his father, Jim, to see me in the clinic. Jim had been a heavy drinker, and was suffering from liver failure. Jim's skin was deep yellow, and his abdomen was distended with fluid. For weeks I cared for Jim, watching him

deteriorate in spite of every therapy. When Jim died, I grieved over him with Phillip and his young wife.

Six months later, Phillip and his wife returned to see me. This time, it was she who brought him. Phillip was drinking! After witnessing the slow, agonizing death of his father, it was hard to believe Phillip would take the same path. We talked about the effect of alcohol on his family, finances, and physical health. I recommended a rehabilitation program, but Phillip was not interested. Again his wife begged him to stop, but to all this Phillip replied, “I can handle my drink.”

A month later Phillip was coming home from a party, drunk. He drove his car into a bridge pillar and was killed — killed by the very thing that he thought he could handle. Like Amnon, Phillip paid for his mistakes with his life. And Phillip’s wife and children are still paying through their grief and loneliness.

- Tommy and Kate came to college with high expectations for their futures. Tommy dreamed of a career in automobile design. Kate’s heart was set on drama and modeling. The two of them met in the first week of fall classes, and it was “love at first sight.” Tommy’s heart pounded whenever Kate took his hand. He’d never experienced a relationship like this before! Kate was smitten by Tommy’s good looks. She never thought someone so handsome could be interested in her.

A few weeks later, Tommy took Kate for a long walk. He took both her hands, looked her straight in the eyes, and said, “Kate, will you marry me?” It took her only a nanosecond to decide. “Yes!” she replied with glee.

Things started moving even faster after this. The following weekend Tommy went to meet Kate’s parents and tell them the news. Wedding plans dominated their relationship for the next two months, and the ceremony was held during Christmas break. After a quick honeymoon, Tommy and Kate were both back in classes.

Things went well enough for a few weeks. But then Kate began to feel doubts. “You know, Tommy, this is really a big adjustment. I want to spend more time with my girlfriends, and go out for the volleyball team. But you want me home every evening. I used to have enough money to buy clothes, but now my parents say that I’m on my own — and you and I don’t have a penny. I want to finish school, but one of us is going to have to get a full time job!”

Tommy was defensive. “Well you’re not the only one who is unhappy! Even working part-time, I can’t study enough to get into my career track, let alone time to see my friends. I don’t think I really know you after all. You’re not the sweet girl I met six months ago. You were just acting that way to catch me!” He paused and sat down on the bed. “And I’m not the strong, shining knight you thought I was. . . .” Tommy took in a long breath. “Maybe we shouldn’t have decided to get married so quickly.”

BETTER DECISIONS

Fortunately, poor decision-making doesn’t need to be a permanent quality. Let’s consider some people who made better choices:



- Matt Condon and I went to high school together, competed on the same sports teams, and often over the same girl’s affections. We usually lost at both of these endeavors, but ended up winning each other’s friendship. As I got to know him, I learned that Matt’s father was an alcoholic, and that Matt’s entire family was involved with a recovery program.

Matt had a little trouble himself with drinking in high school, but he managed to keep it under control. The problem resurfaced after he was married, had children, and was the pastor of a large church near Seattle. Matt went in and out of sobriety, condemning himself, and even considering suicide. The temptation to

hide his alcoholism was great, for Matt knew he could lose his family, ministry, and income if the problem was discovered. Yet Matt also knew that without confronting his alcoholism, it would eventually kill him, as it had his father.

One Sunday morning, Matt boldly stood up before his congregation. “You have remarkable trust in me as a spiritual leader. One theme I have emphasized is our need to admit our problems and help one another. Today it’s my turn to act on what I’ve taught. I am an alcoholic, my problem has become uncontrollable, and I am entering a treatment program tomorrow.”

Instead of rejecting Matt, the people of his church surrounded him and his family with support and affection like Matt had never received before. After months of rehabilitation, he returned to his full-time duties. “But if I had not confronted my drinking,” Matt declares, “I’d probably be dead today.”



• Barry Borrar is another man whose decisions are right on target. He began early in high school to make plans for life following graduation. Barry requested information from colleges and organizations to help him choose a career tract. Barry was ready when the day arrived for his appointment with the school career counselor.

Mr. Goodwin, the career counselor, was a tall, muscular man who frequently ran his fingers through thinning hair. Barry wondered if kids made him tear his hair out. “Well, Barry,” the counselor inquired, “your time here is almost up. Have you thought about what you might want to do when you graduate?”

Barry spread out his folders of career information on the desk in front of the counselor. “Yes, I have. I’m going to be a professional pilot and aircraft mechanic. After I graduate, I’ll enter Tarrant Junior College for a year to complete the liberal arts requirements before I go to Moody Institute. I’ve already been accepted into Moody’s

aviation technology program. That will take three more years to complete.” Barry spoke confidently, and Mr. Goodwin rubbed his forehead in wonderment.

Barry continued. “When I graduate from Moody, I plan to go on staff with Mission Aviation Fellowship. I’ll live in a foreign country and fly pastors, doctors, and relief supplies to impoverished people. I’ve been looking at some pilot requests for Central American. So, I’m currently taking Spanish courses.”

Mr. Goodwin shook his head in awe. “That’s fantastic! You’re the first student I have counseled this year who already has a plan worked out. Most people don’t do that until years after they graduate, if ever!”

Barry not only had a clear plan, he also carried it through. I was one of the doctors he eventually flew to isolated villages in Honduras.



• Kevin and Nancy Dye had a much different dating experience from that of Tommy and Kate above. Kevin was from the tiny town of Vichy, Missouri, while Nancy was a city girl from St. Louis. Kevin played banjo, while Nancy enjoyed classical-style piano. What they did have in common was chemistry lab as freshmen at the University of Missouri in Kansas City. The two got to know each other as they jointly fouled up their experiments. After two semesters of this, they also discovered some personal chemistry brewing between themselves.

For the next three years Kevin and Nancy were almost inseparable. But their relationship rarely consisted of fancy dates. Rather, they spent time studying, rescuing needy friends, and working out their sticky philosophical differences. Nancy remarks, “I knew our relationship was really looking secure when we began purchasing one copy of textbooks to share between the two of us.” But even after announcing their engagement, Kevin and Nancy held their wedding off for yet another year.

I frequently perform at weddings. Unlike several fragile unions I witnessed, Kevin and Nancy's relationship was not only heartfelt, but had been developed and tested over thousands of real-life encounters. It's no wonder that today their marriage is one of the very best.

THE PRESSURE IS ON!

These stories illustrate just some of the impact decision-making skills can have on our lives. Many of us get so caught up in today's excitement or pressure that we don't think much about the future. Our next date, exam, or party is what occupies our thoughts. Others recognize the need to make future plans, but we shrink back for lack of confidence. We've been hurt by earlier decisions, so why take another risk? Or we imagine we really have no choices, so we don't try to change course.

You and I can't afford being swept along from event to event or crisis to crisis. These won't take us where we need to go! Nor can we allow ourselves to be timid or paralyzed. Instead, each of us must boldly decide how to live and courageously begin to pursue our goals.

TAKE ACTION!

- What are some good decisions you have made? What are some bad ones? Make a list of each.
- Who among your friends seems to know with certainty what he or she wants to do in life? Go and talk to that person. Ask your friend how he or she makes such good decisions.
- Do you know someone who you feel often makes bad choices? Discreetly observe this person. Can you determine what he or she may be doing wrong?