

Choose Wisely

“Tell the people, ‘This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; they will escape with their lives’” (Jeremiah 21:8, 9).

Scripture: Jeremiah 21:8-14

Song: “It’s Your Life”

Each day we make decisions. Some are less consequential, while others can be life-altering. While simple choices are often made without much thought, we tend to agonize over those things with deeper implications. It is as if we need to figure out which bridges to cross and which bridges we should burn.

The people of Judah had a choice. The decision would be life-altering for them. Stay put in their city and face certain death—whether by the sword of the Babylonians, starvation, or horrible disease—or surrender to the cruel Babylonians and escape with their lives but not much more. Speaking through Jeremiah, God could not have made the choice more clear. Life or death.

Thousands of years later, we read these words and think, *This decision would be simple! Surrender and live!* But the people of Judah had strayed so far from God that even with the consequences spelled out, they refused to surrender their will and accept life. As you face choices today, seek God’s leading through prayer and His Word. Listen for His voice, then choose wisely. Choose life.

Father, thank You for Your wisdom and instruction that You make available to us so that we aren’t left to make decisions on our own. Help us surrender and live. Amen.

May 18

Expressing Christ's Care

Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge (Deuteronomy 24:17).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 24:17-22

Song: "Make Me a Blessing"

As I read the newspaper, log in to social media, and watch the evening news, I realize that social injustices surround me: homelessness, poverty, lack of food and clean water, unequal wealth distribution . . . The list seems endless. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed. It appears that the world has forgotten (if it ever knew) how to care for the needy, the destitute, and the deprived.

The focus of such inequities in today's reading is the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. Throughout the Old Testament, God cared for these people in a special way. What I take from today's reading is simple: let those in need benefit from my abundance. Nothing tricky in those instructions. Nothing beyond the ability of most human beings. My wife's Bible study decided that they need to do more than read and learn. They now collect groceries for a local food pantry.

We use words to tell of Jesus' victory over sin and death. We express this in our actions as we care for people around us. I can help them with what I have. Share the wealth God graciously pours out on you. God wants us to treat people with respect and to see that they encounter the justice that comes from knowing Jesus.

Loving God, You placed me in a position to care for others. Shape my heart to reach out to those who need Christ's care. In His name, amen.

Lighting the Way

He is to read [the law] all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD (Deuteronomy 17:19).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 17:18-20

Song: “More About Jesus Would I Know”

As I entered the library, I thought about the many times I had previously utilized the service to get a novel, a travel book to plan a vacation, or a book recommended as a must-read. Recently, I’ve discovered the ease of checking out an e-book, never entering the brick-and-mortar building. Some books opened new worlds to me, others made me think deeply, and biographies inspired me. I thought about hundreds of available books and the knowledge I gained in reading.

God’s instructions to the Israelites were to appoint a king who would fear God and observe His laws. The king would make wise decisions by reading the laws daily. The king’s strength was not in wealth or political alliances, but in God’s Word. It would be an anchor in stormy times. It would sustain the king and keep the kingdom residents on the course that God planned for them.

I thank God for libraries and the knowledge they provide. I am more thankful to God for His holy Word that is a lamp guiding my way through life. One of the rewards of regular Bible study is that slowly, and sometimes without my awareness, the printed text of Scripture becomes part of me—fixed in memory, filling my subconscious with the wisdom and teaching of God. Slowly the truths of God are hidden in my heart.

God of wisdom, thank You for lighting my way with Your Word. In my Savior’s name, amen.

May 20

Entering God's Presence

He who does these things will never be shaken (Psalm 15:5).

Scripture: Psalm 15

Song: “Blest Are the Pure in Heart”

When I enter the airport to leave Louisville for some distant destination, I must first pass through the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) gate. I present my airline boarding pass and my driver's license or passport to the agent sitting at the entry. He looks at me, then looks at the photo on the document, and then looks at me again. Maybe he's checking the color of my eyes or the gray hair on my head that was a bit darker when the picture was taken. He gives me a nod, says “Have a nice day,” and motions me to proceed. Once I have passed scrutiny, I may enter the concourse and proceed to my flight gate.

Picture yourself as a pilgrim arriving at the Old Testament temple of the Lord, preparing to enter. You ask the question: “Who may enter here?” The answer is not bound to physical attributes—your height or the color of your hair and eyes. Rather, the response describes the life lived by the believer: those who walk blamelessly, those who speak truthfully, those who wrong no one, and those who give graciously.

To be all those things all the time is impossible, but they give me a helpful model—four specific reminders of how to act in almost any situation. If I can aim for these standards when under pressure, a stranger might guess that I am a Christian.

Lord, strengthen me to be more like You and model Your love for others. Amen.

Deadwood

“Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness”
(Jeremiah 22:13).

Scripture: Jeremiah 22:11-19

Song: “Take My Life and Let It Be”

I watched from my kitchen window as a group of tree trimmers gathered in my neighbors’ driveway and my driveway to scrutinize my neighbors’ large oak tree. For a year, the dead branches of their tree have overhung my driveway, and deadwood from that tree has dropped onto my yard. The dead limbs were dangerous, and they were ugly. But within a few hours, the deadwood from throughout the tree had been cut and run through the chipper, the truck was gone, and the beautiful autumn leaves had burst forth!

Jeremiah condemned King Jehoiakim for the “deadwood” that filled his life. The king of Judah had entrenched himself among his possessions in his lavish multi-room palace. The life of Jehoiakim appeared perfect as he tried to project an aura of stability and financial means. Sadly, he defined his life and his worth by treasures gained from injustices to his people.

We are always in danger of being governed by our life-robbing possessions. Today, begin an exercise in trust by getting rid of the deadwood and allowing the richer colors of life to be seen in your world. Today, try to abandon those things in your life that really hold no value or don’t promise a richer life for you or for those who may be blessed by your abundance.

Lord, help me never to be so concerned with the things of this world that I neglect to reach out to those who are in need. In Your name I pray. Amen.

May 22

Danger Warning

“You have not obeyed me” (Jeremiah 22:21).

Scripture: Jeremiah 22:20-23

Song: “Prepare to Meet Thy God”

My daughter is a hiker. Whenever possible, she and friends depart their homes in Portland, Oregon, for long drives that terminate at mountains in Oregon, Washington, and occasionally Canada. The natural beauty of these God-created destinations calls them over and over. Usually there are pictures posted on social media of a snow-capped ridge or the blue hues of a mountain lake. But on one occasion, these hikers were stopped abruptly. “Bear tracks,” one of them uttered in a soft voice. The imprints were frighteningly fresh—and large. The hikers obeyed the warning signal and retreated.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God warned Israel about what was to happen to them. The king had shed the blood of innocent people and oppressed the poor—not to mention worshipping pagan gods. He was not shamed by his sin. Because God’s warnings were disobeyed, allies would fall away, disgrace would come, and calamity would befall the nation.

My daughter and her friends were grateful for the warning given so clearly: Danger! Bear nearby. Sometimes I am not so thankful for an alert and would rather ignore the sign and do as I please. But if I am open to God’s voice, I know that God always expresses love for me and for all His children. God warns us through the Ten Commandments and advises us through the guidance of trusted Christian friends. He often says to his beloved sons and daughters: Warning: danger is nearby.

Loving and caring God, open my heart to Your leading, and may I pay attention to Your signs to guide my path. Amen.

God Is Sovereign

“As surely as I live,” declares the LORD . . . (Jeremiah 22:24).

Scripture: Jeremiah 22:24-30

Song: “Eternal Father, Strong to Save”

There was a time when I raced through each day. I tried to do everything myself. I thought I could accomplish anything with just a little more determination. I pushed through tasks and responsibilities because, I thought, no one else could accomplish the undertaking. Then I had a boating accident and cracked several ribs. The pain was intense with every movement. I could do nothing for months. One morning I awoke to a quiet world covered with snow. Nothing moved. Everything was beautiful and caught in a perfect stillness. God seemed to be sending me a message.

God was also sending a message to King Jehoiachin: God is alive, is in charge, and will right all injustices. The king would be given over to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. He would be hurled into captivity without descendants to rule on the throne of David in Judah. The sovereign God would see to Jehoiachin’s fall.

God’s message to me was, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). In other words, surrender to His will. Don’t try to go it alone. Don’t think that you are really in charge. There are times when God wants me to be active in righting injustices. There are, however, many other times when it is time for stillness, for listening, and for knowing that He is the God who lives.

Everlasting God, help me to rest in You and to desire Your will each day of my life, that I might magnify and glorify You. In Jesus’ name, amen.