

So, let's begin with a question that I'm sure you have pondered probably most of your adult life. Why are people who've had too much to drink inclined to make such bad decisions? Do you ever wonder about this? Why are people who've had too much to drink, so inclined to make bad decisions? Anybody out there have any ideas? Oh yeah, I see that hand, go ahead. Because they've had too much to drink, no, that's not the answer. Anybody else? I mean, think about this. You've heard the stories, perhaps you have some stories, some are kind of funny now, in hindsight, some perhaps tragic, some are still a bit hazy.

So here's the question, what's the correlation? What's the correlation between alcohol consumption and poor decision-making? I mean, as far as I know and you may know of an exception but as far as I know, there's no correlation between alcohol and good decision making, right? I mean, I've never heard a story that concluded with this, "It's a good thing I was drunk, otherwise I might've made a really bad decision". Anyway, so back to my really bad question. Why are people who've had too much to drink inclined to make bad decisions?

Now, physiologically speaking, there are two reasons and you probably know this, alcohol actually increases norepinephrine in the brain, which acts as a stimulant and stimulants, of course, increase impulsiveness and decrease inhibition. So there's less sensitivity to the potential consequences of a decision. Perhaps worse, alcohol actually temporarily impairs the activity of the prefrontal cortex. You know about the prefrontal cortex? This is the part of your brain that enables you to connect the dots, to think rationally and consequently to make good decisions. It's actually that part of your brain that didn't begin working properly until you were about 20 or 21, or in my case, anyway, the bottom line is simply this, alcohol frees a person to act without thinking clearly or without feeling appropriately. It makes us brave when we should be cautious, it makes you loud when you should be quiet.

I think Ron White said it perfectly when he described being arrested for public drunkenness. Here's what he said, you may have heard this. He said, "I had the right to remain silent but I did not have the ability to".

People who've had too much to drink are inclined to make bad decisions because, well they're temporarily desensitized to social, cultural and specifically, relational cues. They ignore the obvious because, well, when you're inebriated, it's just not all that obvious to them, right? So, inebriated people, they can't help themselves. When someone's drunk, they don't consciously ignore common sense, it's not that they consciously ignore common sense, it's like common sense isn't even there to be ignored. They don't consciously ignore their conscience, it's suppressed. Their conscience, is in some ways, it's switched off.

That's why the following afternoon they or maybe you are texting with a friend, "I did what? You're sure it was me? There's video"? Anyway and what does this have to do with you? Well, if you're drunk, it should be obvious. But of course it isn't because, well we've covered that, right? If you're sober, I want you to hang on and I'll tell you what this has to do with you. Actually, I'm gonna tell you what this has to do with all of us in just a moment. Today we're in part four of our series,

Better decisions, fewer regrets, Better decisions, fewer regrets.

And if you've been tracking along with us, you know that the big idea in this series is the often overlooked relationship between good questions and good decisions, good questions and good decisions. Good questions actually set us up for good or better decisions and I'm absolutely convinced that if you will get in the habit of asking, answering honestly and acting on your answer to these five questions, you will make better decisions and you will consequently live with fewer regrets. Your life will be better and the people who look to you, the people who depend on you, their lives will be better as well because as we've said every week, we aren't the only people impacted by our decisions. and we're not the only people impacted by our regrets either, right?

So in part one, I suggested you memorize the saying from the book of Proverbs, hopefully some of you have done this. And the saying goes like this, "the prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple, the naive, they just keep on going and they end up paying the

penalty". And the reason I wanted you to commit this saying to memory is as straightforward as these five questions are, they're going to bring you into conflict with a sales associate that lives in your head. You know what I'm talking about, the sales associate in your head that wants you to act now, wants you to decide fast, wants you to decide on or focus on the immediate, rather than the ultimate. And this saying or this verse is a reminder to look beyond the moment and not to look away from potential danger, the danger associated with the options you have a propensity to sell yourself on. These five questions will slow you down and help you see danger coming.

Now, again, if you're tracking along with us our first question, we called it the integrity question and the integrity question is this, am I being honest with myself? Am I being honest with myself? And then we added a word, really. Am I being honest with myself really? Or am I selling myself on something I'm gonna regret later? So I hope you've been honest with yourself, even if the truth about yourself makes you uncomfortable with yourself. Our second question was the legacy question and the

legacy question is, what story do I wanna tell? What story do I wanna tell? When the decision that you're in the process of making right now, whether it's relational or financial or academic or professional, when the story or the decision you're making right now is reduced to a story you tell, what story do you wanna tell? What story do you want told about you? And the good news is this, you get to decide.

As far as it's up to you, you write the story of your life, one decision at a time. And that brings us at last to our third question, we call it the conscience question, the conscience question. And this also brings us back to my opening question, regarded inebriated people. Now here's the thing, while intoxicated folks can't pay attention to external or even internal cues, us sober folks are often guilty of choosing to ignore external or internal cues, right? I mean intoxicated people have basically silenced their conscience, but sober people often choose what we sometimes choose to ignore, our conscience. And by conscience, I'm talking about that internal tension competing for our attention when we consider an option that if we choose it, it's gonna lead to

regret. Intoxicated people can't help themselves, but oftentimes we won't help ourselves. And the outcome, the consequences are often no less devastating.

So the third question, a question we should ask anytime we're making a decision of any magnitude is this, is there a tension that deserves my attention? While I'm making the decision, when I'm considering options and I'm sort of focusing in on one option, does that option create a tension that deserves my attention? Now sometimes, actually I think more times than we would like to admit, an option that we're considering creates tension inside of us, something about it just doesn't seem exactly right, it gives us pause, causes us to hesitate you know how this goes. Initially, we have no reason why, we have no idea why. Why is this bothering me?

I've heard this referred to, maybe you've heard this as well, referred to as a red-flag moment. My dad, he had a different way of expressing this. He would say, I have a check in my spirit about that, I have a check in my spirit about that. And as a kid, this would drive me crazy

because I would want information, tell me exactly what you're talking about. And he would just smile and say, I don't know, I can't put my finger on it, there's just something that doesn't seem right about this. Now you may have another name for it, but you know what I'm talking about, right? It's just that internal sense of something about this, I don't know what it is, something about this, don't ask me a lot of questions, something about this just doesn't seem right. And when that it happens, you owe it to yourself to pause and pay attention to that tension, pay attention to the tension. Don't ignore it, don't brush by it, don't rush by it, don't talk yourself out of it, pay attention. Let it bother you.

Now the problem of course with this whole idea is that this is not easy to do and it's not easy for all the same reasons we've talked about in this series. Focalism blurs and exaggerates things, confirmation bias distorts things, our schedules compress things. Sometimes we're in a hurry, sometimes somebody else is in a hurry, the salesperson in our head is always in a hurry. And in most instances, we're under the impression and this is huge, in

most instances, I think we're under the impression that what's bothering us isn't really bothering anybody around us, everybody else seems to be fine with whatever it is we're considering, nobody else in the office seems to be wrestling with their conscience. I mean, technically it's not illegal, it's not immoral, but there's just something in you that feels like there's something not right about this.

So, when something dings your conscience, pay attention. Now this point you may be thinking and I get this, at this point, you may be thinking, okay, Andy look, I'm not sure exactly what you're talking about, but I don't make decisions based on my feelings, some intangible tension that probably doesn't deserve my attention, I just look at the facts and then I decide based on the facts. Allow me to push back just a little bit. Actually you don't, but I know it feels like you do. In fact, people who understand the brain and understand how the brain works, here's what they say, they say that when we have these red-flag moments, it's actually a specific part of our brain alerting us to pay attention. And if we pause, we stand a far better chance of making a better

decision. And if we don't pause, we sell ourselves right on past the tension that deserves our attention.

And in fact, if you are into facts, pause and more facts may in fact surface. This isn't emotionalism, in fact, it's actually a facet of your intellect trying to slice through the fog of the exaggerated, distracting bits of information cluttering your ability to think rationally, so pay attention to the tension. And then there's this, we've all had this experience, you're considering an option, you're in the middle of making a decision, you're considering an option and you have sort of a plan coming together and nothing about it bothers you, then somebody else comes along and points out something you hadn't considered before and suddenly there's a tension where before there was no tension, a slight hesitation. And it's usually your mom, isn't it?

I mean, moms are great about this, honey, that all sounds good except for the fact that I think it's illegal. But it's not just our moms, sometimes it's a friend. Hey, that sounds good

to me, but what's your wife gonna think about that? What's your husband gonna think about that? Does your boss know about this, tension. Can you afford that, tension. Doesn't your contract rule that out, tension. And of course the problem with somebody else bringing things to our attention is that it creates relational tension, doesn't it? And that's a tension you should pay attention to as well.

And here's why. We all, and I'm including myself in this, we all have a tendency to dodge the truth by discounting the truth teller, right? I mean, what does he know? What does she know? I mean, he's never walked in my shoes, he's never run a company, she's never navigated the complexity of family life the way I'm having to navigate it, In fact, she can't even run her own life. I mean, look at his kids. Experts actually referred to this as the genetic fallacy or the fallacy of origins. Since I don't like where the information is coming from, I'm just gonna ignore the information.

So here's the thing. As you consider your options, if there's any hesitation around a

particular option, pause and allow and I don't know a better way of saying this, just allow that tension to rise up and get as big as it possibly get before you decide. If something bothers you, let it bother you. If something about him just doesn't seem right, if something about him just kind of bothers you or about her just kind of bothers you, let it bother you, right? That job offer, that invitation, that deal, the fine print, if something bothers you, just pause and allow it to bother you, face it, embrace it, but don't excuse it. Face that tension until it either goes away or you decide to go in a different direction. Pay attention to the tension. If you don't, well, we'll get to that in just a minute.

Now, there is a fascinating and rather well-known narrative from the life of King David, Israel's second king, that illustrates the importance of paying attention to a seemingly irrational and in his case, an inconvenient tension. And I love, love, love this story. Now, as you probably know, David steps onto the pages of history as a shepherd boy. During that season of his life as a kid, a prophet shows up at his house where he's living with his family

and announces to his family that God had chosen David to be the next king of Israel. Now that's a good day, when a prophet shows up at your home to say that one of your kids is gonna be the next king.

Now the problem, of course, was Israel already had a king, King Saul, but Saul wasn't doing a very good job kinging, so God decided to replace him, but not quite yet. So time goes by and young David has his legendary encounter with the Philistine giant Goliath that we all know about. And in that moment after killing Goliath, David immediately becomes a household name throughout the kingdom of Israel and throughout the territory controlled by the Philistines as well. And it didn't take long before his popularity exceeded that of old King Saul, who was not a very good king. In fact, if you know this story, Saul becomes jealous of David, he tries to kill David, David is forced to flee, he becomes a fugitive, but by now, he's a legend. As far as the people of Israel are concerned, he's a hero, he's a war hero. And by the time he left Saul service, he had a reputation not only as a warrior, but as a leader.

So dozens and then hundreds of men flopped to David's side. Before long, he had his own small little army but it was an army without a home, it was an army made up of people just like David, fugitives from the law. So as the story goes, eventually, Saul get some really good intel on David's whereabouts and he gathers together about 3000 soldiers, which in ancient times, was a huge army, it was virtually impossible to gather that many soldiers in one place, but somehow, King Saul pulls together 3000 soldiers because he feared David and he knew his military prowess. And he leads his column of soldiers into the desert of Ein Gedi to remove this threat to the throne once and for all, because he'd heard that David had been anointed king and as a king of course Saul, wants his son Jonathan, to become the next king.

So as the story goes, late one afternoon, as they're winding their way through the rocky, wind-swept hills of the desert of Ein Gedi, Saul halts the entire column of men, so he can find somewhere private to relieve himself. He spies a cave and he heads off unaccompanied to

take care of business. Now, if you know the story, you know this is where the story takes a strange and somewhat providential twist. David and a handful of his merry men are actually hiding in the very cave that Saul chooses. I mean, what are the odds of that? I mean, you talk about the stars lining up, the gods smiling on you, right?

From David's perspective, this was a best-case scenario. Apparently what had happened was this, when David got word, cause he had some intel as well that Saul and his oversized posse were headed his way, he told his men to scatter, hide in the hills until Saul and his soldiers pass through. And then once they were gone, David and his men would reconvene and escape in the opposite direction. And all of this was working perfectly according to plan until Saul gets nature's call, dismounts his mule and makes his way up to the very cave that David chose as his temporary hideout. And when David and his men see Saul coming their way, what did they do? They just moved further back into the cave.

So imagine this from David's perspective. He's inside the cave, he's back in the recesses of the cave, he's staring out at the mouth of the cave and Saul appears as a silhouette. Saul has just come in from that bright middle Eastern sun, he can't see a thing, he walks in just far enough to ensure his privacy, he takes off his robe, tosses it to the side, hikes up his outer garment, squats down facing the opening of the cave, with his back to David and his men. Clearly, if you're David, clearly this was an omen. I mean this was a sign from God. God had delivered David's enemy into his hands.

What else could this possibly mean? I mean, he'd already been anointed king, everybody knew he was next. The only thing standing in his way was the current king and there he is, unguarded, vulnerable, unsuspecting. And if David wasn't thinking that, we know the around him were because of David's biographer, well, here's what he says happened, he says his men whispered to David as they're back in the cave, they whispered to David, David, David look, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he told you a long time ago, I will give your enemy

into your hands for you to deal with as you wish".

And there he is. David, this is what you predicted would happen, decision made, let's kill Saul and go home, enough of this wilderness, fugitive living. This was the perfect scenario. I mean, think about it, no civil war, minimal bloodshed. So they're thinking David, come on, just do it, kill the king before the king kills you. Besides, what other option was there? Remain an outlaw for the rest of our lives? This needed to end and this was the perfect, clearly God-ordained time to end it. So you can imagine, you can just imagine the emotion in the cave that afternoon, the adrenaline and imagine the pressure that David felt to act.

But here's what makes this story even more interesting. David felt something else as well. There was a tension about this, there was a hesitation, something about this wasn't exactly right, but he wasn't sure what it was because in this scenario, in this context, the hesitation didn't make any sense. So he did what many of us do, he decided to act. He drew

his dagger and he crept up behind Saul with every intention of slitting his throat. And if David is successful, the world as he and his men knew it, would change immediately. But as he gets closer, that tension increases.

And David, this is so unimaginable, so amazing and David, in spite of the fact that there seemed to be no alternative, David paid attention to that tension. He let what was bothering him, bother him. And somewhere between leaving his hiding place back in the cave and Saul's unprotected back, it dawns on him, just seconds away, seconds away from making a decision, everybody would understand and everybody would applaud, in just seconds away, he gains clarity. Wait a minute, I'm about to murder the king. This isn't war, this isn't combat, this is murder and this can't be right. Besides he thought, who put Saul on the throne of Israel to begin with? Who made Saul the king? God did. And who am I to replace what God has put in place? This can't be God's plan. I can't kill the king, even if the king is trying to kill me.

So this is amazing. In spite of the pressure to act, in spite of the expectations of the friends just a few yards behind him, David changes course. Now this is part of the story where we all have something in common with David, believe it or not. Here's what we have in common with David. David didn't know what the outcome of killing Saul would be. Think about this. David didn't know for sure what the outcome of killing Saul would be. He thought he did, but there was no guarantee things would work out the way he envisioned things working out, right? I mean, he thought he knew, the men with him, they thought they knew, it's simple, kill the king, become the king, problem solved, right? What's up with all this hesitation? But there is no guarantee that that will be the outcome.

Now please don't miss this. This is so important, one of the reasons we ignore the tension when we're making a decision, one reason we just push through and ignore the advice of other people or the voice of our conscience, one reason we push through is this, we believe that in certain circumstances, we can predict the future, that we can predict or

even control outcomes. And when we're convinced we can predict outcomes, when we think we know, we make decisions that oftentimes we regret, because we don't know, we don't always predict the future, right? You don't always predict outcomes accurately, do you? Does anybody?

Let me ask you this, have you ever been disappointed? Of course you have. And what's disappointment? Disappointment is what we experience when we miss to predict the future. Now here's my point. Ignoring that tension in your gut, ignoring that tension, sets you up for disappointment, paying attention to that tension, allowing whatever it is that's bothering you to bother you, is how you avoid unnecessary disappointment and regret. So back to David. He's inches away from Saul and it dawns on him, hey, just because I kill the king, doesn't mean I'll necessarily become a king, but one thing is for certain, I'll be the man who killed the king, that will be my story for the rest of my life, that will be my legacy, that's the story I'm gonna have to tell my children. That's the story I'm gonna have to tell my grandchildren.

Imagine that, grandpa, tell us one more time how you became the king, how you snuck up behind King Saul while he was using the potty and you slit his throat. You're so brave, right? That's not the story David wants to tell and that's not the story David wants told about him. In fact, the author of this story says this, that David was conscience-stricken, conscience-stricken, this is how we know he was paying attention to the tension. So somehow, some way, he paid attention to his conscience and he does something very few people have the self-control to do, he changed course midstream. Instead of murdering Saul, he cuts off a corner of Saul's discarded robe and he makes his way back to the men in the back of the cave and of course they are in shock. I mean, they were so close to going home, only to watch this perfect opportunity slip through their callous fingers. And the expressions on their face, they said it all up, basically were saying, David, you've got some explaining to do, right?

And so he whispers, the biographer tells us that he whispers to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing". But wait a

minute, why did you leave the recesses of the cave then? Why are we here? "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed". to which they whispered, well then let one of us do it. But "David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul". And Saul left the cave and went on his merry way, having no idea how close he came to losing his life that afternoon. Saul rejoins his men, gets back on his meal, he's preparing to continue his search for David when suddenly, this is such an interesting, dramatic part of the story, when suddenly he hears a voice calling his name, Saul, Saul and 3000 heads turn. And there stands the very man they have been hunting, the man they have paid to kill the giant killer. There stands David and he's in the mouth of a cave that Saul just exited.

Can you imagine the drama of this moment? And he's holding something in his right hand, it's a piece of cloth, the color of Saul's Royal robe. And Saul yanks his cape around to look and sure enough, the corner is missing. And then David bows down to the ground, the mouth of the cave, he bows down, then he stands to

his feet. He stands to his feet and everybody recognized in that moment that David was the better man. Once again, David was the hero in his own story. He spared Saul's life when everybody knew that Saul would have taken his. And after a short speech, David concludes with this powerful, powerful statement, a statement that we should all take to heart.

He says to Saul with everyone listening, "May the Lord judge between you and me". May the Lord be the judge between you and me. I'll wait and I'll allow God to determine the outcome of this conflict. I will not take matters into my own hands and I will not replace what God has put in place and I will not play God in your life Saul and I will not play God in mine. And I will not use your bad behavior as an excuse to do bad things. Saul, I will not be like you. A measured response for sure. A measured response that resulted from paying attention to an inconvenient, talk about inconvenient an inconvenient, irrational tension.

Now, back to the story, all eyes on Saul. He's been humiliated by David, but here's the amazing thing, he wasn't humiliated by David's

military skill, he was humiliated by David's humility. So what do you do now if you're King Saul? Continue the pursuit? Pursue a man who could have taken your life, but chose not to? Do you close your eyes, say, I'm gonna close my eyes and count to 100 and give you a headstart, right? I mean, even Saul knows better, so he turns his army around and he heads back to the city.

Now let me ask you a question, we'll get back to the story in a minute, do you wanna be the hero in your story? Do you wanna be the hero in your story? Do you know that you get to choose whether or not you're the hero in your own story? Do you wanna be the hero in your story Back to what we talked about last time, do you wanna write a story you'll be proud to tell and you'll be proud for your children and your grandchildren to know and to tell? Then pay attention, pay attention to that tension.

Months later, Saul and his army are embroiled in a battle with the Philistines when a random Philistine archer stationed just behind the Philistine infantry, launches an arrow intended to fall randomly among the Israelite army, but

this random archer's random arrow found a seam in Saul's armor and he's mortally wounded. He doesn't wanna die at the hands of the Philistines, so he falls on his own sword and he dies as the Israelite army is routed. And when word reaches the city, the citizens of the primary city at that time, they proclaimed David king and he becomes the king without murdering the king. And maybe, I don't know, this isn't in the text, I think maybe David thought to himself, well, if somebody had told me it was gonna work out like that, it certainly would have made that whole cave episode a whole lot easier. I mean, if God has shown up and said David, just relax.

Seven chapters from now, the Philistines are gonna take care of Saul for you. Wouldn't that have made things so much easier? But you know this, that's not how life works, is it? That's why we have to pay attention to the tension, that's why we dare not take matters into our own hands, that's why we dare not trust our ability to predict the future or control outcomes. That's why whenever you're making a decision of any consequence, you have to stop and ask yourself, is there a tension that

deserves my attention? Years ago when my daughter, who's now married, was in the eighth grade, Allie, I was helping her study for a test and you know how this goes parents. You feel like when you're studying for a test with one of your kids that you're gonna take the test the next day, right?

So we're studying and I really wanted her to do well and she was a good student and it occurred to me that Garrett, her older brother, had had the same teacher in the same class two years before. So I said, hey, let me see if we can find some old tests to study from, like you do in college, cause she gave me that look, I'm like, no, this isn't cheating, this is just what you do. So I go digging around and sure enough, I find an old test and I assured Allie, hey, teachers, they change tests all the time, otherwise they wouldn't have given this test back. The next day she goes in to take the test and it's the same test. When she got home, of course, I asked what parents ask, I said, how did we do on our test? She said, dad, it was the same test Garret had and I felt like I was cheating. And I said, no, no, no, no, you weren't cheating, that's not cheating and then

I go on to give her this long, convoluted explanation about why using an old test to study from isn't cheating, trying to ease her conscience, right?

She interrupts me and she says, "Dad, it's okay, I told him". I'm like, "Wait, you told your teacher"? She said, yeah, I told him that I had Garrett's old test and that I used it to study from and that it was the same test. So of course now I'm feeling terrible and I said, Allie, I'm so proud of you, I got you into trouble. And then I said, well, so what happened? And she said, well nothing. He said he had planned to change the test, but the copy machine wasn't working that morning so he just used an old test and it wasn't a problem. When Allie saw the test that morning, she had a decision to make, do I tell my teacher or not?

Now, I'm pretty sure that when I was in the eighth grade, I might have opted for no, anyway. But when she thought about not, there was what? There was attention and she paid attention to the tension and she told her teacher the truth. And I'm so glad she did, otherwise I would not have been able to use

this story as an illustration. Anyway, now what does all that have to do with you? Here's what it has to do with you, here's what I know about you. The decision that you're wrestling with right now, falls somewhere between choosing whether or not to tell your math teacher that you studied from an old test and murdering a king, right? But the principle is the same. If there's something in you, if there's something you can't quite put your finger on or perhaps something someone else has put their finger on about an option you're considering and now it bothers you, just stop, pay attention, give it some time.

Let it bother you until you know why it bothers you, don't ignore it, don't brush by it. It may be, I don't know, it may be God's way of protecting you and protecting your family. This may be His way of keeping you from a decision that you will live to regret. That inconvenient, seemingly irrational tension, may be the pathway to an option you've never considered, an option you didn't even know was available. So here's the question, is there a tension that deserves your attention? Is there a tension that deserves your attention? Every

time you're considering an option, every time making a decision of any consequence, stop and ask the question, is there a tension that deserves my attention? And if so, pay attention to that tension like David and like Allie, you'll be glad that you did.

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