

So, here's a disturbing thought to get things kicked off today. The easiest person, the easiest person to deceive is the person in the mirror. The easiest person to deceive is the person in the mirror. And it shouldn't be this way. And we'll talk about why it's this way in a minute. It shouldn't be this way, but for the moment I just want you to let this sink in. Actually, I would like to kinda rub it in. You think about it, you have talked yourself into to the point of today's message, you have deceived yourself into, you have sold yourself on every bad decision you have ever made. Worse, you are the mastermind, I mean, you thought this stuff up. You are the mastermind behind most of your most regrettable decisions.

Whether they were financial, relational, professional, academic, you were there for all of them. Just to make it worse, you've probably done more to undermine your own success and your own progress than any other individual on the planet. Now granted there were outside pressures and there were other voices, people promising you stuff trying to sell you stuff, but in the end, you decided. And, the reason I know so much about you is well, I know so much

about me because I'm equally guilty like you. There's a sales associate that lives in my head and his voice sounds a lot like my voice. And although his logic is completely flawed and his sales pitches are amateur at best, I fall for them anyway. So what's up with that? And what's wrong with me and what's wrong with you and what's wrong with us? And to the point of today's message, what can we do about it?

So today is part two of our series, better decisions, fewer regrets. And as you may know I recently published a book under this title. And for that reason, I was a bit hesitant to turn this into message content or into a series lest people think I'm just trying to sell books. But in fact, this series is designed to provide you with the content of the book so you don't have to read the book. Better decisions, fewer regrets. Now the big idea of this series is the often overlooked relationship between good questions, good questions, and good decisions. Good questions and good decisions. Good questions actually set us up for good or better decisions. And then, there's a sense in which our decisions are really never any better than

the questions that we ask or actually don't think to ask.

And I'm convinced, I'm absolutely convinced that if you will ask, if you will ask and if you will answer honestly, and then act on your answer to the five questions in this series, you will in fact make better decisions and you will live with fewer regrets. Your life will be better. And the people who look to you, depend on you, their lives will be better as well because and this is so important, let's face it, we aren't the only people impacted by our decisions. And we aren't the only people impacted by our regrets either. And parents, grandparents, if you will teach your kids, and if you will teach your grandkids to ask these five questions, I promise their lives will be better as well.

Now, last time we were together when we kicked this whole thing off, I suggested that you memorize the saying from the book of Proverbs. So, if you memorized it, I would like for you to raise your hand if you did. Oh, that's great about, it looks like maybe 10, 15% of you did. Now, the reason for the homework assignment is

that this simple saying from the book of Proverbs actually reminds us to consider what's coming, not just what's right in front of us. Ultimate not just the immediate outcome of our decisions. And here's the verse in case you missed the first part or in case you haven't committed it to memory yet. And this is a verse as I said last time, I memorized early on and I taught my kids early on.

Here's what the writer of Proverbs says "The prudent see danger, and when they see danger, they do the appropriate thing. They take refuge but the simple or the naive, they just keep going. They just ignore what they see. And they pay the penalty". When deciding what to do prudent people, or wise people take into consideration the long-term results of whatever options they're considering but simple people, naive people, not so much. They fall for the amateur sales pitches of the salesperson in their head. They opt for now over later. So here's the thing, the five questions we're gonna discuss in this series will bring you into conflict with the sales associate that lives in your head and you need to know that ahead of time because the salesman in your head

wants you to act fast and want you to act now, to focus on the immediate rather than the ultimate.

And this verse is a reminder to look beyond the moment and not to look away from potential danger associated with an option you find yourself selling yourself on. These five questions will slow you down and they're gonna create the perspective you need to see danger coming to connect the dots. So let's jump in the first of our five questions. Question number one, I call it the integrity question, the integrity question. And to introduce this question, we need to drop back to my opening somewhat disturbing observation that the easiest person to deceive, the easiest person to deceive is the person in the mirror, which means the most difficult person to lead is the person in the mirror as well. You cannot lead yourself well as long as you are deceiving or lying to yourself.

Have you ever tried to lead a liar? It's pretty much impossible to lead a liar in a professional setting, in the marketplace, at work you have to fire a liar. So today I'm

gonna challenge you to fire the dishonest version of you and hire a new you, an honest you, a you that tells you the truth even when it makes you feel bad about you. Now, you know from experience that dishonesty erodes credibility, right? I mean, and in a similar way and this is kind of odd to think about in a similar way, when we are dishonest with ourselves it erodes credibility within ourselves. And I know that sounds strange, but think about it this way, when we lie out loud and I'm not calling you a liar but you know, occasionally we all kind of stretch the truth. But when we lie out loud what do we do immediately on the inside in our heads and our hearts? We justify the lie. And who do we justify the lie to? To ourselves. We have to otherwise we're at odds with ourselves, something that a sane people can't do for very long.

So what we do is we create a narrative that justifies our lie or our half truth. And then this is the crazy part, we choose to believe it which really is crazy. I mean, why would you, why would we believe a narrative we basically just made up? Well the non-technical,

nonclinical answer to that question is this. You are a sucker for you. You can convince yourself of just about anything. And so can I, I mean, as my AA friends, my NA friends, and my one CA friend has taught me, rigorous honesty, rigorous honesty is the first rule of recovery. Rigorous honesty with ourselves and others is the first rule of recovery. Rigorous means extremely thorough exhaustive sometimes exhausting, meticulous, rigorous honesty with ourselves and others. That's the first step to getting better and making progress to make better decisions to avoid unnecessary regret, you've got to tell yourself the truth. You have to tell yourself the truth even if it makes you feel bad about your self.

Now what I'm gonna say next I realized runs contrary to the grain of our culture, but as you know, I'm not really here to be liked. And so let me just put it out there, there are worse things, there are worse things than feeling bad about yourself. For starters, denying something bad about yourself refusing to acknowledge what's bad about ourselves is bad for ourselves. So to make the best decision you have to be honest with yourself even if it

makes you feel bad about yourself or to put it another way, you will never get you will never get where you need to be until you acknowledge where you actually are. Besides if you aren't honest about why you're choosing what you're choosing, think about this, you'll have a difficult time taking responsibility for the outcome of that decision. And we have an adjective for people who refuse to take responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions, don't we? We call them irresponsible.

Do you want to be irresponsible? If we're dishonest with ourselves when we're making a decision, we will be dishonest with ourselves about where to lay the blame for the outcome of our bad decisions. In this way, this is important, in this way dishonesty leads to irresponsibility. And you know what seen that play out in the lives of other people. Now, the fact that everything I've said so far is pretty much obvious. You probably didn't write any of that down. It doesn't make any of this easy and it doesn't make it easy to get this right? In fact, your first step may be being honest with yourself about the fact that you're not always

honest with yourself but whatever the case to decide your way into a better future. And that's what this whole series is about, to decide your way into a better future, you've got to develop the habit of telling yourself the truth specifically the uncomfortable truth about why you choose what you choose to do.

Then that leads us at last to the first of our five questions. And the first question to ask anytime you're making a big decision is the integrity question. And the question is simply this, am I being honest with myself? Am I being honest with myself? Now you may not owe it to anyone else but you owe it to yourself to be honest with yourself about the decisions and the choices that you make, why you do what you do. If you want to justify your decisions to other people, that's fine, I guess, but there's no win, there is no win in justifying your decisions to yourself besides justifying, you know what justifying is? Justifying is really just a lying. And why would we just a lie to ourselves? So just tell yourself the truth.

Now it actually helps to ask this question out loud. In fact, all five of these questions, it

helps if you ask them out loud, but this one in particular and it actually helps to ask this question twice but on the second round, you should add a word and some of you already know what that word is. Am I being honest with myself really? Am I being honest with myself really? And the reason we have to add really is because we are so prone to deceive ourselves. Why am I doing this really? Why am I avoiding him really? Why do I keep postponing that really? Why do I keep making excuses really? Why did I say yes, really? Why did I choose to wear this really? Why did I choose to purchase or lease that really? Why did I move in really? Why am I moving out really? Why won't I get help really?

And here's the thing, you may not be good at selling anything to anybody else but when it comes to selling yourself on a bad idea, you're amazing. Me too. Our greatest regrets are associated with things, opportunities, and people we sold ourselves on. I mean, just think back to your last bad relationship decision you were in love or you were in lust or something, whatever it was you were in it. And your momma tried to warn you. Your best friend tried to

warn you, but you assured them, you knew exactly what you were doing. And then looking back, you wonder, what was I doing? What was I thinking? Which is the problem, you weren't thinking you were selling you were selling yourself.

And the same is true for your most recent bad purchasing decision. Once you had it in your hand or once you had your heart set on it on whatever it was, it was pretty much over. It was like something took over. And the next thing you know, you're handing your credit card to someone you don't even know to buy something you couldn't, or perhaps shouldn't even afford. And why, because you sold yourself. So here's a little tip. In fact, if you don't remember anything else from our time together today, I want you to remember this. As soon, as soon as you start selling yourself on anything you should hit pause. The moment you begin selling yourself, you should hit pause. And here's why, because we rarely have to sell ourselves on a good idea. When it comes to good ideas or good decisions, we usually just know.

So let's just stop with all that. Just tell yourself the unfiltered truth. Be honest with yourself. I mean, come on, it's not gonna hurt. Well, you may hurt your own feelings momentarily but in the end, you're gonna be better off. We all are right. I mean, lights will come on, and granted lights can be terrifying just ask the roaches and the rats, right? But light is a disinfectant and truth is as well. They go hand in hand. So bring your narratives and bring your justifications and bring your excuses into the light and just tell yourself the truth. You're gonna make better decisions.

Now, if everything were equal if we were kind of wired to decide what's best for us this would be really easy. In fact, if that were the case we'd be pretty much done here. Just tell yourself the truth, I'll see you next time, right? But things aren't equal. And as it turns out choosing what's best, choosing what's best isn't, what's natural. Now, naturalist and you may be a naturalist or materialist, they have an explanation. You may have an explanation for why it's so difficult for us to tell ourselves the truth. Christians have a different

explanation but everybody pretty much agrees that we come into the world with a natural propensity on selling ourselves what we want to do rather than what we ought to do. And this is not a recent observation.

In fact, this is kind of interesting, the 17th century English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon. You probably studied about Francis Bacon in school. He made the following observation, this is a little bit long but this is from the 17th century. Here's what he said in that 17th century way of writing. He says, "The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion". In other words, once we kind of come to what we want to do, "Draws all things else to support and agree with it". In other words, once we've kind of made up our mind what we want to do, we become a magnet for anything that supports what we've decided we want to do. And then he says this "And though there'd be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet," he says, "Yet these it either neglects or despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects".

That's just a fancy 17th century way of describing what we call confirmation bias that we are naturally open, or we naturally open ourselves up to anything that confirms what we already think and what we already want to do. And we instinctively, I love the way he says it. We instinctively set aside or reject anything to the contrary. Again, just think back to your last bad relationship decision. You were warned, and it wasn't that you wouldn't listen, it was more like you couldn't listen. I mean, think back to that recent bad purchasing decision. It's so clear now, but in the moment Francis was correct, "The human understanding the human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion" I've already made up my mind, "Draws everything else or all things else to support and agree with it".

And though he says, "And though there be, though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side". In other words, even though there's plenty of arguments to the contrary "Yet these our minds either neglects or despises or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects". That's been going on for a long time. And this is

helpful in terms of an observation but it doesn't really tell us why this is the case nor does Francis tell us what to do about it. But almost 2,500 years before Francis Bacon wrote these words, a Judean court advisor turned prophet made a similar observation but fortunately for us, he added a bit of helpful explanation and the context for his observation, I think it's both fascinating and instructive, so here's the backstory.

Around 600 BC, Jeremiah who's the author of the old Testament book Jeremiah, served as a pretty much a professional coach or like a court advisor to a series of Judean kings whose careers honestly would have gone much smoother and whose lives would have lasted much longer had they listened or taken Jeremiah's advice. But of course the advantage of being a king is that you don't have to take anyone's advice.

Now, ancient Judah was essentially like the bottom half of what we consider the Holy Land. So that's where this story takes place. Jeremiah actually began his coaching career with young King Jehoiakim. King Jehoiakim was a pretty much a teenager at the time. And at the

time he became king, Judah was actually paying an annual tribute or a financial tribute to Babylon who in return would then provide military support and then pretty much allowed Judah to run her own affairs.

So after three years of paying this tribute, King Jehoiakim decides, you know what enough of that? And he quit making payments. And then worse than that, he changed banks meaning he declared loyalty to Babylon arch-rival Egypt. And when Jeremiah his advisor heard about Jehoiakim's decision, he begged him, he begged him to reverse course. This wasn't just a bad decision. This was a dangerous as well because the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar was already in a really foul military mood after being defeated by the Egyptian army just a few months earlier. So Jeremiah rightly assume that Nebuchadnezzar would, well Nebuchadnezzar would love to find a place to vent his frustration and a vassal state that had just sworn loyalty to his enemy Egypt.

Well, Judah would be the perfect target and not only was Jehoiakim's decision foolish and dangerous. Jeremiah assured him that well, this

decision is actually in direct opposition to God's will for the people and for the nation as well. But Jehoiakim, not impressed. He's the king besides Jehoiakim had long since abandoned the ways of Judaism. He was a merciless tyrant whose sexual appetites led him far outside the moral prohibitions outlined at the Jewish law. So he did what kings do, he just ignored Jeremiah. And sure enough King Nebuchadnezzar did exactly what Jeremiah predicted he would do. He came looking for his tribute. Nebuchadnezzar and his armies laid siege to the city of Jerusalem for three months. And then his army entered the city, put Jehoiakim in chains, and then marched him back to the city of Babylon and added him to his king collection.

Now I've mentioned this before, but it's so fascinating. King Nebuchadnezzar collected kings. Some people collect coins, some people collect baseball cards King Nebuchadnezzar collected kings. Whenever he conquered a territory he would capture the king alive, take the king back to Babylon and add him to his king collection. Then on special occasions when he wanted to show off how powerful he was he

would bring all of these kings out like show and tell and parade them around the courtroom in golden chains. And each king would walk with his hand on the shoulder of the king in front of him because in addition to being chained King Nebuchadnezzar had all of these kings blinded.

Now back to our story, before leaving Jerusalem King Nebuchadnezzar, crowned Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin to be the next king, he was a whopping 18 years old. And then three months later, and I'm gonna skip a bunch of history here, three months later, Nebuchadnezzar changes his mind. He comes back to Jerusalem and he adds Jehoiachin to his king collection as well, which at this point you're thinking nobody's probably really anxious to be the next King of Judah, right? But every kingdom needs a king. So Nebuchadnezzar appoints Jehoiachin uncle Zedekiah to be the next King of Judah. He was 21 years old, but what Zedekiah didn't know, in fact, what nobody knew is that he would be the last King of Judah because like the Kings before him he would not listen to sound advice.

In fact, one of the Jewish historians said this about him, "He did evil. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God, and he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet". He just wouldn't listen. Once his mind was made up, much like most of us once his mind was made up, he could not hear he could not hear, neither could he embrace the wise counsel of the prophet. He did exactly, he did exactly what King Jehoiakim had just done. He refused to pay tribute to Babylon. And once again, Jeremiah pleads with Zedekiah to change his mind. This was not gonna end well for the King. It's not gonna end well for his family. It's not gonna end well for the nation, but again kings will be kings.

And when Jeremiah realized Zedekiah wasn't listening he did something really interesting. He took his message to the streets of Jerusalem, encouraging the citizens. He said to the citizens, Nebuchadnezzar is gonna show up. And when he shows up, the best thing to do is to throw open the gates and allow him into the city. Well, when Zedekiah found out what Jeremiah was doing as he marched through town, you know warning people and giving people this

advice he had Jeremiah thrown into a dry cistern just to shut him up because he was scaring the children. Actually, he was scaring the entire population and they should have been scared, because sure enough just as he predicted again, Nebuchadnezzar himself shows up at the Gates of Jerusalem surrounds the city and waits and waits and waits in an effort to starve the inhabitants into submission.

When King Zedekiah realized his mistake what do you think he did? He went looking for Jeremiah and he begged Jeremiah to ask God to deliver the city. And Jeremiah assured him, King Zedekiah it's too late for that. The fate of the city has been sealed. Their only hope was to throw open the gates and beg King Nebuchadnezzar for mercy. Zedekiah knew there would be no mercy for him or his family. So he snuck out of the city at night with his body guard and his children, yet another really bad decision. He was eventually captured. And then he was forced to watch as his children were butchered one by one by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers. And that would be the last thing, King Zedekiah would ever see. He was blinded,

chained, and marched back to Babylon to join Nebuchadnezzar's king collection.

So the next time somebody tells you the Bible is boring. You just tell them the story of King Zedekiah right. Now here's the thing, when you hear a story like that or when you read a story like that or maybe when you watch something like that play out in real life, you can't help but think what were they thinking? How could anybody be so clueless, so deceived? And fortunately for us, Jeremiah who was there for this entire adventure this entire tragedy watched the whole thing, play out. He answers that question for us. He explains why we're so prone toward self deception. Why we're so good at selling ourselves on a bad idea or bad options. Here's what he writes, "The heart is deceitful above all things," your heart my heart, his heart, her heart, even those precious children of yours, their hearts, the heart is deceitful above all things.

Now Jeremiah chose his adjective carefully. There's a difference between being dishonest and being deceitful, right? Dishonest is well dishonest is a lot easier to spot than

deceitful. Dishonest is just straight up not honest, but deceitful, deceitful, usually includes a mix of truth and half truth, and untruth. Deceitful is difficult to detect. You've met dishonest people who just weren't shrewd enough or smart enough to deceive you. They were just too obvious, but deceitful people they're the dangerous ones. And our hearts are deceitful. Our hearts are dangerous. It's why we're so convinced, and at times so convincing, we don't merely lie to ourselves, we deceive ourselves and here's how it works or appears the way I think it works, once your heart once your heart, or my heart gets wrapped around something that we want I think our hearts send a message to our brain and says, "Hey, brain I want this go figure out a way to justify it". And our brains are really smart. That's why we call them brains, right? And our brains know that whereas it's difficult to justify a want. It is not difficult to justify a need.

So the first thing the brain does is it upgrades the messaging to something far more sophisticated than a want. The brain says "You need this". And back to what Francis Bacon said

and what Jeremiah said, once we're convinced once we're convinced we need something, it is so easy to sell ourselves on it. Before long we have a list of justifications for buying it, drinking it, asking it out, inviting it in. But the reasons we used to sell ourselves, let's be honest. The reasons we used to sell ourselves they're not really reasons, they're justifications. And in most instances, if we're honest, if we slow down and think about it We know, but we fall for it anyway. We're so easily deceived by our own heart.

"The heart is deceitful above all things". But he wasn't finished. And he says, "Our hearts are beyond cure". There's no cure, this is a permanent condition. You don't outgrow it. We don't out mature it. We can't fix it, we're doomed. Okay, we're not doomed, but a permanent condition requires constant supervision right? A proactive response. And then Jeremiah wraps this up by saying something or describing something, I guess we've all experienced. He says this, "The heart is deceitful the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it". And that's a good question because I certainly don't. I don't even

understand the decisions I make even though I know everything I'm sharing with you and have known it for quite some time. Who can understand who can understand it?

Apparently nobody does, nobody can. Which explains why we've all said at some point along the way, "I don't understand. I don't understand why I did what I did" which is just another way of saying I don't understand why I decided what I decided. I don't understand why I chose what I chose. And this explains why we do the very thing we advise other people not to do. It's why the person in the mirror is so hard to lead. They just won't tell you the truth unless unless you force them to, you gotta pin them down, you gotta look them in the eye and you have to ask, are you being honest with yourself? Are you being honest with yourself really?

And the sooner you embrace and the sooner you embrace this disturbing fact about yourself, and I hate to be the bearer of bad news but the sooner you embrace this fact about yourself the sooner you'll be open to information and advice that conflicts with where your heart is taking

you. The more suspicious and cautious you'll be when that salesperson inside of you starts selling you. So this week, this week before you decide I want to encourage you to have sort of a heart to heart with yourself. And I think you should do it in the mirror, I do. And you should ask yourself out loud and you should use your name. Andy, are you being honest with yourself? Are you being honest with yourself really? And then just tell yourself the truth. Even, even if you don't plan to act on it, because you owe it to yourself to know, you owe it to yourself to know even if it points you in a direction you don't intend to go.

And this is where the conflict is because we think and this is pretty much true that if we are honest with ourselves, we're gonna feel like we need to hold ourselves accountable to do what we know we ought to do. And that's absolutely true but I'm giving you permission not to do that. Just begin with being honest with yourself. It won't hurt to know, but here's something you do know, what you don't know, what you won't know, what you refuse to know, can certainly hurt you. So just be honest

with yourself. Most people aren't, don't be most people.

So I would love to challenge you to make a decision today. I would love for you to make this decision. I will not lie to myself. I will not lie to myself even when the truth makes me feel bad about myself. I will not lie to myself even if the truth, even if what I discover makes me feel bad about myself, because there are worse things than feeling bad about myself. And that is deceiving my self about something about myself that I need to change. So would you ask yourself am I telling myself the truth or am I selling myself a regret? Am I telling myself the truth? Or am I selling myself a regret? Am I honest with myself really?

So as we wrap up, I'd like to get this kicked off for some of you, not all of you, perhaps, but some of you and I'd like to just ask a few questions. And most of these questions maybe none of these questions will intersect with your current circumstances but perhaps a couple of them will. And if nothing else here's an example of the kinds of things we should ask ourselves. So you ready? Why do you continue to

go out with him really? Why do you continue to go out with her really? Why did you file for divorce really? Why are you taking that job really? Why are you quitting your job really? Why did you move in really?

What's the real reason? What's the real reason you don't call your kids? What's the real reason you don't call your mom, your dad, your brother, your sister? Why won't you tell her? Why won't you tell him the truth about what's going on really? It's brutal, isn't it? It's terrifying, it's clarifying. And ultimately, it's liberating and it's empowering.

So be honest with yourself. It doesn't come naturally. That's what Jeremiah says. But most things that are good for us, they don't, do they? Jeremiah was right. The heart is deceitful above all things and it is beyond cure. This is a permanent condition. But now, you know, and now you know what to do about it. And the prudent when they see danger, when they see trouble coming, they do something and trouble is always just one bad decision away. So would you decide I will not lie to myself even when the truth makes me feel bad about

myself, I will not lie to myself even when the truth makes me feel bad about myself. I will tell myself the truth really. I will tell myself the truth really.

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