

So one thing I think we all have in common is our love of story, right? Our love of story. We all love a good story. Whether it's a book or movie, maybe part of a comedy series, fiction, nonfiction. I love historical fiction. Maybe it's something that happened to a friend. Maybe it's your most embarrassing moment. And we all love to hear and many of us enjoy telling stories. What's not apparent that should be is that each of us is actually creating a story. The story of our lives. It should be apparent because when someone asks you about your past, where you're from, how you met, where you went to school, what do you do?

You dip back into a chapter of your story, the story of your life. Now, if you were like me growing up, you were interested in your parents' stories, right? I loved to ask my parents when I was growing up. I loved to ask them about when they got in trouble as kids. For some reason, those were my favorite stories. Maybe it just made me feel better about myself. I don't know. But if your family is anything like mine, there may actually have been some legendary stories in your family, right? Stories that you enjoyed hearing over

and over and over and stories you ask your parents or maybe somebody else in your family to tell over and over and over.

But, here's the thing. While those events are happening in the past, nobody is thinking in terms of story, right? What are they thinking? They're thinking in terms of current events. I mean, it wasn't a story, it was something that was happening in the moment. And this sets us up for where we're headed today. Every significant or unusual current event in your life, even a season of life, once it's behind you, once it's behind us, what do we do with it? We reclassify it as a story, a story we tell or a story we hope we never have to tell, a story too embarrassing or painful to tell. And often, the determining factor as to whether or not we want that story to be told is the decisions we made while the story was unfolding, right?

The truth is, we write the story of our lives one decision at a time. Whether it's a thoughtful response or an emotionally fueled reaction, we write the story of our lives one decision at a time. More on that in just a

minute. Today, we're in part three of our series, better decisions, fewer regrets. And the big idea, the big idea behind this series is simply this, it's the often overlooked relationship between good questions and good decisions. And as we've said, good questions set us up for good decisions. In fact, in some way, our decisions are no better than the questions that we ask or the questions we don't think to ask.

And here's the promise of this series. If you will ask and if you will answer honestly, and then if you will act on your honest answer to the five questions that this series is built around, I promise you, you will make better decisions and consequently, you'll live with fewer regrets. Your life will actually be better. And the people who look to you, the people who depend on you their lives will be better as well because, and you know this, we aren't the only people. We aren't the only people impacted by our decisions. And we are not the only people impacted by our regrets either.

Now the one I suggested you memorize this saying, a saying from the Book of Proverbs, and here's the saying. I hope some of you have memorized this. "The prudent see danger, the prudent see danger," and they do something. They respond appropriately. "They take refuge, but the simple", or the naive "they just keep on going and they pay the penalty". And the reason I want you to commit that saying to memory is this, as simple and as straightforward as these five questions are, they will bring you into conflict with the sales associate that lives in your head, just as they bring me into conflict with the sales associate that lives in my head. Because this little sales associate that lives in your head and his or her voice sounds a lot like your voice, right, they want you to act now. They want you to decide fast. They want you 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 the potential danger associated with one of the options you catch yourself selling yourself on. These five questions will slow you down and they will create the perspective you need to see danger

coming. This verse will give you the perspective you need to connect the dots between the options you're considering and a future you may prefer or a future you would prefer to avoid.

Now last time we introduced the first of our five questions. The first question was the integrity question. And the integrity question is, am I being honest with myself? Am I being honest with myself really? So I hope since the last time we met you have been being honest with yourself, really, and I hope you've been being honest with yourself even if the truth about yourself made you feel a little bad about yourself. Because as we said last time, acknowledging where we are is the first step to getting where we ultimately want to be. So when making a decision of any magnitude, ask yourself, am I being honest with myself really?

Today is the second question and I call this the legacy question. The legacy question. Anytime you're making a decision of any magnitude or of any consequence, I want you to pause and ask the legacy question which is, what story do I want to tell? What story do I

wanna tell? Think about it this way. When this decision or maybe this entire season of life, when this relationship, when this business transaction is reduced to simply a story that you tell, what story do you wanna tell? What story do you wanna tell? Do you wanna be the hero or do you wanna be the villain? Do you wanna be the good example or do you wanna be the bad example? Which option will make this a story worth remembering as opposed to a story or you hope no one ever tells and no one ever finds out about? Which option would make this a story you'll be proud to tell your children someday, maybe even your grandchildren?

And here's the good news. Here's the good news. You get to decide, but you decide one decision at a time because as far as it is up to you, you write the story of your life one decision at a time. And every decision you make, every decision you make becomes a permanent part of the story, the story of your life. Every decision you make has an outcome, a consequence or a result, may be good or bad, desirable, undesirable, expected, unexpected, whatever the case. That outcome becomes a permanent part of the story of your life. Your boss comes along

and he asks you to lie to a client and you choose to lie to the client and the client finds out and calls you on it. And the boss lays the blame on you and you lose your job.

Now, part of your story is that you lied and you lost your job because you lied. It's not a good story. What about this story? Your boss asks you to lie and you choose not to lie and you lose your job because you wouldn't do what your boss asked you to do. It's not a great story, but that's a better story, right? Or how about this one? You met this guy, he was just kind of okay. He was convenient. There wasn't anybody else on the horizon. Something in you knew this really wasn't something you should pursue but you did anyway. And two years later, the whole thing just evaporated. It's pretty much a story you hope no one even asks you about a story that no one finds out about.

How about this one? Your friends wanted you to go out, but you had an exam to study for and you said, no. You stayed in and you studied and you aced the exam. And that was a decision you made over and over and over and now you have a degree to show for it. That's a good story. The

point is simply this, every decision and the outcome of that decision becomes part of your story which means decision by decision, you are writing the story of your life. That's why when you're making a decision of any magnitude you've gotta pause, look ahead, and think, when this is nothing more than a story I tell, what story do I want to tell? The decision you are wrestling with right now, right now is gonna be nothing more than a story you tell someday.

What story do you want to tell?

Now, the challenge with this is this, in the midst of current events, in the midst of circumstances, we don't think of our lives in terms of story. Now it is a story, but we don't think that way. For example, if you recently lost your job, surviving this season without a job, well, one day, this is just gonna be a story that you tell. What story do you wanna tell? I lost my job, I was embarrassed, I started drinking too much. I racked up some unnecessary debt. I lost the respect of my friends and my kids. That's not a great story. It's understandable, I mean, losing a job. I mean, going for a prolonged period of time without work is terrifying. It's terrifying.

But the decisions we make in the valleys eventually are just stories we tell on the other side. Or maybe back to the dating thing, you're dating someone and things are going okay but there's someone else in the picture.

And yeah, she's married or he's married but you find yourself gravitating in their direction and they seem to be gravitating in your direction as well. And you get the sense that if you're willing, they're willing, your decision, your decision will be a permanent part of your story and hers or/and his. What story do you wanna tell? I got involved with someone at work who was married. I ended up busting up a marriage. Now their kids ping pong between two homes on the weekends. Is that the story you wanna tell? I don't think so.

Now, here's something that I think is true of all of us. You'd like to be able to tell your entire story without skipping any parts, without skipping any chapters or having to lie about the details, right? I mean, someday, you'd like to be able to sit down with your kids or maybe even your grandkids or maybe someone you hope to spend the rest of your life

with and tell your entire story. And isn't it true you'd like to be the hero in your story? I mean, I think we all want that. And I think going forward, you can have that but it will require you to stop mid decision and ask, what story do I want to tell? Which of the available options do I want as a permanent part of my story?

Now, I think one of the reasons we don't think about story when we're making decisions is we get distracted by the pressure and the emotions of the moment, right? I mean, emotion, when it comes to decision-making, emotion is like a fog. It causes us to lose sight of the broader context which is our story. And you know how this works. You're up against the deadline. You've gotta decide and you've gotta decide soon. If you won't marry me, I'm leaving. Nobody wants to be left. If you don't make your quota, you're fired. Nobody wants to be fired. I mean, when you're forced to make a decision under pressure it is hard to think about tomorrow much less your story, right? Because you've gotta get through today.

So whether it's love or fear or jealousy, the emotions associated with the decision making process, they always complicate the process by focusing our attention on the immediate, rather than the ultimate. And consequently, we're left thinking in terms of options, not our story. And the challenge is, and you know this, there are no emotionally neutral decision-making environments, right? I mean, when it comes to big decisions, it is almost impossible to be objective because of the way we feel because of our emotions. This is why your worst decision, and I know we've never met.

So I'm taking a gamble here. But my guess is your worst decision was fueled by something with strong emotional appeal, right? Maybe a first marriage that was pretty much doomed from the start, that purchase, that lease. I mean, it was so appealing, you bought it. It was so appealing you ate it, you smoked it. It was so appealing you dated it and you moved in with it, right? And if you're in retail sales, you know exactly how this works. You know about the worst thing that you can let a potential customer do is leave the store or leave the showroom without making the sale, why? Well,

you know why. Because once they walk out, what happens? The emotional appeal of your product begins to subside and they're far less likely to make the purchase. We've all experienced that.

Now, psychologists actually have a name for this dynamic. It explains why once our appetites are engaged in the decision making process, to some degree we kind of lose our minds. This cognitive bias has been labeled focalism. Focalism because the victims, and we've all been a victim of this, the victims hyper focus on the one thing to the neglect of pretty much everything else. If you've ever been in love, and I hope you have, if you've ever been in love you were a victim or maybe you are currently a victim of focalism. It's wonderful. All you can see is him, all you can see is her. The point being this. In emotionally charged decision-making environments, whenever there is an emotionally charged decision-making environment, we think in terms of our options, not our stories.

So here's a tip. When confronted, when confronted with anything or anybody with strong

emotional appeal, press pause, not play, because strong emotional appeal, strong emotional appeal should trigger a red flag not necessarily a green light. Instead of leaning in, we should step back. Not because, and this is important. Not because he's not the one, he may be the one. Not because it's not a great investment opportunity. It may be a great investment opportunity. Not because it's not the perfect job. It may be the perfect job. But in spite of that, we should step back because anything was strong emotional appeal, even the right thing, clouds our judgment. So, just hit pause, get your bearings and go home and think about it. Call a friend and for sure, consider, consider, consider your story. Because when you consider your story, it places the decision-making process within the broader context of our entire lives.

Now, the Old Testament story of Joseph. The Old Testament story of Joseph I think is a great reminder of how powerful and legacy preserving this question is. This is why I call it the legacy question. Now, many of you are so familiar with this story you could tell it yourself. So I'll give you the condensed

version. Around 1800 B.C., a 17-year-old named Joseph, the 11th of 12 sons finds himself in a no-win situation that is not of his own making. His father, Jacob, loved him more than all the other boys because Joseph's mother was his father's favorite wife which fueled the fires of jealousy in his 10 older brothers.

Eventually, as you probably know, their jealousy gets the best of them. They decide to kill Joseph. In the end, they lose their nerve and decide to sell him instead which is a bit more merciful and way more profitable. And they sell him to slave traders. And then they tell their dad that he was killed by a wild animal.

And now, and this is important. Now these 10 young men, think about this. These 10 young men have a secret that they are forced to live with for the rest of their lives. They have a chapter in their lives they will be embarrassed to tell. I was so jealous of my younger brother that I, along with my other nine brothers, beat him up and sold him. There were 10 of us and one of them. Who wants to tell that story? And then we lied to my father and broke his heart and said that his favorite son had been killed by a wild animal. That's not a good story. And

now, and now Joseph's brothers are liars for life. Please don't decide anything that makes you a liar for life. Here's why. Whatever you gain in the moment will not be worth what you're forced to carry into the moments that follow.

Back to Joseph. So Joseph ends up on the auction block in Egypt where he's purchased by a military officer named Potiphar. And now Joseph has a decision to make. Do I run? Do I do what most slaves do as little as possible with as bad an attitude as I can get by with? Or do I throw myself into this whole slave thing with everything I've got? Interesting dilemma for a rich kid who grew up as his father's favorite son. And here's what makes this story so relatable for many of us. None of this, none of this is his fault. Somebody else took control of his story. His story like parts of your story were hijacked, commandeered by evil people, selfish people. So why try, why care? That's always the temptation when someone else decides our story in a bad direction.

But somehow in some way, Joseph overcomes the negative inertia, the temptation to just throw

up his hands and give up. He refuses to throw up his hands and let fate have its way. Instead, he decides to serve Potiphar's household as if it were his own. And eventually Potiphar notices and he gives Joseph even more responsibility and he ends up in charge of Potiphar's entire household. Then, if you think about it, that's kind of a story worth telling, right? I was kidnapped once, I was sold twice, I was a victim but I decided not to live like a victim. That was the story that Joseph decided. That was the story that Joseph was writing but then the music changed, right?

If you know this story, you know that his story intersected with somebody else's story, Potiphar's wife, and he finds himself once again, through no fault of his own in a no-win situation because Potiphar's wife insists that he become her lover, probably one of many lovers. And Joseph has two options, neither of which would lead to a good outcome. And it's important to understand in this culture, this was not primarily a moral issue. This was a life or death issue, more like death or death because either way he decided, he could lose his life. And just to point it out he's about

19 or maybe 20 years old when this part of his story unfolds.

And once again, he opts for the better story. And it's at this juncture in his story, and it's one of the reasons I wanted to rehearse this story with you, even though it's so familiar, it's at this juncture in Joseph's story that he employs a powerful, powerful technique, something we should all employ. Here's what he does. Joseph actually rehearses his story out loud as the context for his response to Potiphar's wife. This is how we know he made his decision within the context of his life story. So what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna kind of paraphrase the first part of his response and then I'll read the second part straight from the text.

Essentially, here's what he said. Mrs. Potiphar, I came to this land as a slave. I had no rights and no future. Your husband purchased me and I did my best to serve him and you. And through my hard work and my diligence and through God's help, I've gained the trust of your husband. He's put me in charge of the entire household. In other words, my story is

getting better all the time. And then he says this, and I quote. "With me in charge of the household, he told her, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house. Everything he own, he has entrusted to my care. No one, no one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife". Implication. That's your story.

Mrs. Potiphar, you really need to think this through. Do you really want affair with a Hebrew slave as part of your story? And then Joseph steps back into the broadest context of all. In light of all that's happened, in light of your husband's confidence in me, in light of God's mercy to me, he asked this question. "How then". in light of all that, in light of the way my story is going, "how then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God"? Why would I want, why would I want to add adultery to what's turning out to be a pretty good story with an ending I never dreamed possible? In other words, which of these stories, Mrs. Potiphar, do I wanna tell? I only have two options.

Story number one, your husband gave me an opportunity I never dreamed would come my way. I was faithful to him and the God who has been watching over and looking out for me. That's a good story or story. Or story number two. Your husband gave me an opportunity I never dreamed would come my way, so I took advantage of his trust and had an affair with his wife. Which story do I wanna tell? Which story do you wanna tell? When the decision you are in the middle of making right now is nothing more than a story you tell, what story do you wanna tell? Now, as you probably know, Joseph decided the better of those two stories. He did the right thing, but the right thing turn out for Joseph. Potiphar's wife accuses him of trying to rape her and Joseph ends up in Pharaoh's dungeon. But Joseph's story wasn't over and your story isn't over either.

Now, it's true when we find ourselves in a long difficult season, in a long difficult chapter of our story, it feels like this chapter is the entire story. But it doesn't have to be. Oftentimes, it's our responses, our decisions in those difficult chapters that make all the difference. That make all the difference

between a story that ends bad and a story that ends well. Now, if you're familiar with Joseph's story, you know that while he was in prison, Joseph does the same thing he did in the dungeon as he did in Potiphar's household. He decides well and over time he wins the favor of the prison ward.

Now, nobody's life ambition is to win the favor of a prison ward, but you know what? He just decided to do what he could do with what he had to work with. And before long, he's pretty much running the place. Several years later, and don't let that go by too quickly. Several years later, he finds himself being ushered into Pharaoh's presence to interpret a dream because Pharaoh had a dream that he believed had significance for the nation of Egypt. And none of his magicians could interpret the dream. And then, in another surprising twist in Joseph's story, Joseph assures Pharaoh that he can't interpret the dream either. And I think there was a gasp in the throne room when he said that.

And then he looks at Pharaoh and says, "But God," God as in the Hebrew God, which is a

dangerous thing to say to someone who considers himself a god, God, the Hebrew God can interpret the dream for Pharaoh. Fortunately, that day Pharaoh was more curious than furious and he lets Joseph proceed with dream interpretation. So according to Joseph and according to the dream as he understood, Egypt would experience seven years of record breaking grain harvest. Essentially, the Egyptians would be swimming in grain. And here's why that was a big deal. Bread was a staple for ancient people, all ancient people.

So grain was the primary source for basically what constituted the dominant portion of the standard diet which means if there's no grain, people literally starve. So this was great news, but that was just half of the dream. Egypt would experience seven years of record-breaking grain harvest followed by a famine so severe, Joseph said, that everybody's gonna forget all about the seven good years. Now, when Joseph finished interpreting the dream, everybody in the throne room assumed that Joseph was finished and he would be escorted out. but Joseph wasn't finished. And he does

the unthinkable and he gives Pharaoh unsolicited advice.

Now, nobody gave the Pharaoh unsolicited advice, especially a foreigner who still smelled a bit like the dungeon. But this was advice he gave Pharaoh. He said, oh, Pharaoh, somebody needs to wake up every single day focused on this problem. Somebody needs to wake up every single day focused on preparing Egypt for what's coming. So choose somebody you trust and put them in charge of grain storage. Silence in the throne room as everybody waited to find out what unimaginable horror awaited this arrogant Hebrew who would dare to give Pharaoh advice. But Pharaoh smiles. And he says to the people standing around, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God"? And then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God," Joseph's God, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you".

And then to the shock and awe of everyone standing there, "You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I

be greater than you". And in this moment, Pharaoh makes Joseph the prime minister of Egypt. And once again, Joseph did what Joseph did. He decided well, and he devotes himself to this unprecedented opportunity. Seven years later, as he predicted, a famine devastates that region of the world. Once everybody's personal grain cupboards are bare, Joseph opens the federal grain silos and feeds the nation. And before long, people from all over that part of the world are caravaning to Egypt to buy grain, including, if you know this story, including Joseph's brothers. And when they arrived, he happened to be out that day and he recognized them immediately. But of course, they did not recognize their 30-year-old brother whom they had not seen since he was about 17 years old.

Now, if you've never read this story in Genesis, you should. There are so many fascinating details. We don't have time to explore today. But in the end, Joseph finally reveals his identity to his 10 older brothers and they are speechless. Actually, they are terrified and they beg for mercy they know they don't deserve and in all likelihood will not

receive. And they were sure, they were so sure Joseph would do to them what they had done to him because that's exactly what they would do to him if they were in Joseph's position. But, and here's the point of the story, Joseph wasn't anything like his brothers. And do you know why? Because throughout his life, Joseph refused to react and in refusing to react, he avoided becoming like the people he didn't like. He decided. He against the gravitational pull of bitterness.

So consequently, now that he's got the power, he is free and he is free to write a better story. He decided his life in a different, in a better direction. He decided a story worth telling. That's why we're telling his story. And in that moment, he made a big decision. He decided revenge would not be part of his story. So in addition to rescuing Egypt from the famine, Joseph rescues his entire family and their families as well and he moves them all to Egypt.

Now, that is a story worth telling. A story he decided one decision, one response at a time. Which brings me back to us, which brings me

back to you. What story? What story do you want to tell? What story do you want told about you? Like Joseph, like his brothers, you're writing the story of your life one decision at a time. Don't do what as brothers did. Never, ever ever choose the option that makes you a liar for life. Listen, this is so important. Long after, long after whatever you gained is gone, you'll be left with your lie. You'll be left with a story you won't be proud to tell. Every relational, financial, professional, academic decision and the outcome of those decisions, they become a permanent part of your story.

So write a good one. Decide a good one. And if you haven't decided a good one up to this point, remember this, your current chapter is just that, it's a chapter. It's not the whole story. So, as we wrap up, I wanna challenge you to make a decision right now. I wanna challenge you to make this decision. I'll decide a story I'll be proud to tell. I'll decide a story I will be proud to tell. Every time, every time you're faced with a decision of any magnitude, ask, when this is nothing more than a story I tell, what story do I want to tell? And then, decide accordingly. Because you write the story

of your life one decision at a time, write a good one.

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