

Today we begin a brand new series entitled "Better Decisions, Fewer Regrets". Now, as you may know I recently published a book under this title. And for that reason, I was a bit hesitant to turn this content into a series of talks lest people think I'm just trying to sell books. But that is not my intent. In fact, this series is designed to provide you with the content of the book so you don't have to read the book. Besides you're probably too busy to read a book right now, anyway. But, if you will spend just a few minutes over the next few weeks, consuming, digesting applying these messages, I'm absolutely convinced, well, I'm absolutely convinced that you will, in fact, make better decisions and you will be faced with fewer regrets.

And that's a really, really big deal to me personally, and here's why I say that. And here's why I'm willing to run the risk of having my motives questioned in order to communicate this content. While I appreciate the fact that people I don't know and will never meet read my books, you are my first and primary audience. You're the folks I care most about, feel most responsible for, and,

honestly, you're the folks I feel most accountable to, more than any other group of people, more than any other families, students, singles, couples.

I want you to make good decisions and I want you to have some tools, I want you to have some handles to help your kids and your nieces and your nephews, and perhaps your grandchildren to make good decisions as well. So in spite of the potential awkwardness this creates, or maybe the suspicions it arouses I wanted to communicate this content directly to you. Now, the big idea for this series, "Better Decisions, Fewer Regrets" is the often overlooked relationship between good questions and good decisions, good questions and good decisions. The truth is good questions set us up for good decisions. In some ways our decisions are no better than the questions that we ask or the questions we don't know to ask, and we'll talk more about that later.

So, in this series, I'm gonna provide you with five questions to ask every single time you make a decision of any significance or magnitude financial, relational, academic,

professional. These questions, honestly, have shaped my life and consequently it's shaped my marriage, our parenting. And as you'll recognize, it has certainly shaped my teaching as well. It's the framework for how Sandra and I make decisions all the time. It's how we've taught our kids to make decisions.

So I'm convinced that if you will ask, if you will ask and answer honestly, and act on, if you will ask, answer honestly, and act on your answers to these questions, you will, in fact, make better decisions. You will live your life or decide your life in a direction that significantly increases the odds that you will actually end up where you ultimately wanna be. As important, as important the people who look to you the people who depend on you, the people who work for you their lives will be better as well. Because, and you know this, you are not the only person impacted by your decisions, and you are not the only person impacted by your regrets either. In fact, we have no idea who is ultimately impacted by the decisions we make. In fact, some of your decisions will impact descendants you won't even live to meet. The

impact and outcome of your decisions will shape their story.

Your decisions determine your fingerprints on somebody else's future, somebody else's life. And you know this, sometimes it takes a lifetime for the outcome of some decisions to play out, in some cases it takes generations. For example, and granted this is a bit extreme, think about it, what if George Washington had decided to allow congress to make him a king? Think about the implications of that one decision. They come to George Washington, and we don't know all the details, but they say, "We don't want you to be a president, we wanna give you a throne and a crown. We wanna make you the supreme ruler". What if he'd accepted that offer? The benefits of his decision to refuse that offer, to refuse the crown, they've played out for generations. What if Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had decided to stay up north and remain silent about what he knew was taking place in the South. The aftermath of his decision, that one decision continues to play out to this very day and it impacts all of us.

Now I know you aren't George Washington, and you're not Dr. King, but the same is true for you at some level, and the same is true for me at some level. Generations of people may very well be impacted by the decisions you make. In fact, if you plan on bringing children into this world or if you've already brought children into this world, you know with certainty, that your personal decisions have generational implications. And if you're not convinced, all you have to do is turn the equation around and look back instead of a head.

Think for a moment, think for a moment about how different your life would be if your parents or even your grandparents had decided differently about a few key things. In fact, your grandparents or parents made what seemed to them to be, you know, some small insignificant decisions, but those decisions determined the trajectory of your entire life, didn't they? In fact, in some cases they determined whether or not you would even have a life, but they weren't thinking about you at the time. In fact, you weren't even around to be thought about, but you have been impacted by

their decisions, for better or for worse. Perhaps your life would be very different if your father hadn't chosen to keep picking up that bottle, or you know someone whose life would be very different if their mom hadn't run off and left the family.

And the opposite is true as well, maybe your dad, maybe your dad is the one who conquered that habit, kept the family together. Maybe your mom chose to stay when another woman would have walked. The point being is simply this. We never know. We never know what or who hangs in the balance of the decisions we make. but here's what we do know. Private decisions. Private decisions always have public outcomes. Your private decisions, your personal decisions, your private decisions probably won't stay private. Your personal decisions will impact some other persons, and here's the thing. I know you wanna get this right, we all wanna get this right. And I'm confident that you can, if, if you will simply ask, answer honestly, and act on the five questions we're gonna discuss in this series. Your fingerprints. Your fingerprints on the future will be worth celebrating.

So this is a really big deal, and it's a bigger deal than you, it's certainly a bigger deal than me as I remind parents all the time, this is about the future, it's about future generations. In fact, perhaps if you're a parent you've heard me say this to you. The most significant thing you do, the most significant thing you do may not be something you do. It may be someone that you raise. So, back to you, here's kind of the big idea. Your decisions, my decisions. Your decisions determine the direction and the quality of your life. It's your decisions that determine the direction and the quality of your life. Your decisions in a way are like the steering wheel of your life. Our life, our experiences they follow our decisions. In fact, you are where you are because of decisions you've made.

And I know you're gonna push back on that just a little bit, because it wasn't just your decisions that landed you where you are today. And as we just pointed out, you are where you are, in part, because of decisions other people have made as well. But before you push back too far and too hard consider this. Your responses,

your responses or your reaction to decisions other people made that influence your circumstances, your responses are decisions, right. A response is a decision. We decide how we respond. We choose our responses.

Remembering that remembering that is how you avoid a victim mentality. This seemingly small nuance explains how people who've been dealt the worst hands imaginable, a hand they had no control over are able to rise above their circumstances and accomplish, in some cases, extraordinary things.

That's why people who have every reason in the world to be bitter and angry and cynical or self-destructive, it's how they avoid all that. And how do they do it? Well, they decide, they decide rather than react away into the future and in doing so they create a preferred future. Besides we have all lived long enough to know that a response, a response always creates a better path forward than reaction, right. I mean, I don't know about you, but I rarely have to apologize for a response. I almost always have to apologize for our reaction. A reaction generally makes, well, a reaction generally makes a bad situation worse. A thoughtful



response generally creates a bridge, a way forward. Reactions usually create regret.

In fact, earlier this year, I reminded you that your ability to respond rather than react is your superpower. Remember we talked about this, it's your superpower deciding to react, deciding to react, sets us up to become a reflection of what we despise. Deciding to react, actually, sets us up to become a reflection of the people, in some cases, that we despise. To react is to relinquish control of your own story. It's like handing the pen to an enemy and asking them to write the next chapter of your story. But deciding, deciding to respond allows us to thwart evil, redeem pain. In some cases it empowers us to reverse the course of our lives.

So, once again, never, ever, ever, never underestimate, never underestimate the power of a measured response. And never forget that your responses are decisions. This is how you write. This is how you decide your best story. Now, as we're about to discover, if you will pause to ask any of the five questions we're gonna discuss in this series. If you'll pause long

enough the pause will create the margin you need to respond rather than react. So we are where we are primarily because of decisions we've made, and we're headed in the direction we're headed for the same reason, which means, of course, that your future will be determined by your decisions as well. Your decisions determined the story of your life.

So the good news is this. If you don't like, if you don't like your current story if you don't like the current chapter in your current story. If you don't like the current direction of your story, you have the opportunity to decide your life in a different direction. You can decide a better story. You can decide your way toward a preferred future. You have the opportunity to decide a good story. More on that in week three.

Now, before we get into too much detail, I wanna to tell you where the idea for the series originally came from. It really started with my dad. When I was a kid, when I was a kid my dad had a terrible habit. At least I thought it was a terrible habit. His terrible habit was this. He wouldn't tell me what to do, specifically he

wouldn't tell me what to do when I didn't know what to do and I wanted him to tell me what I thought that I should do. Now. I know that most kids don't really want their parents telling them what to do. And I was like most kids most of the time but on occasion, like some kid, most kids, on occasion I just needed him to tell me what to do, and he wouldn't tell me. In fact, it was worse, instead of answering my question or my questions, he would ask me questions.

And his go-to question was this. He would say, "Andy, what would you do if I wasn't here to tell you what to do"? I heard this 1,000 times, "Andy, what would you do if I wasn't here to tell you what to do"? And of course my go-to response was, "But you are here, so tell me". And then my dad's go-to question wasn't his only question, there were so many questions. During middle school and high school, his arsenal of questions included one of the five that we'll explore later. And one that you've heard me talk about before he would say, "Well, Andy, what do you think, what do you think is the wise thing to do? What do you think the wise thing is for you to do"?

I hated this question. I hated this question, especially in middle school and high school because in middle school and high school that question usually eliminated most of my preferred options. But when I took it seriously it also eliminated a lot of unnecessary regret. But what I didn't appreciate then as a kid that I certainly appreciate now is this, the why, why all the questions? Why not just answer my questions and tell me what to do? It would have taken a lot less time. And you can probably guess why he asked me so many questions because he was more interested in teaching me how to make decisions than he was in making decisions for me. He was way more interested in setting me up to know how to make decisions.

When I was older, when I was in college, when I was an adult than he was simply making decisions for me. And for parents, the shortcut is to just answer all our kids' questions and make all the decisions, right. But my dad was wise enough to know, and I think partly because of the way he grew up. He was more interested in teaching me how to make decisions than he was in simply making decisions for me. Now, he

started really early, maybe too early, but to his credit and to my advantage, he started while the stakes were low. He started when the consequences of my decisions weren't all that bad.

Now, unbeknownst to me, and I think unbeknownst to him, he was also teaching me something else as well. And that's something else is pretty much the overarching theme of this series. By opting for questions over direction, by choosing questions over simply telling me what to do, he connected two very important dots for me, dots that, I think, most folks never connect. He helped me make the connection between good questions and good decisions. Good questions and good decisions. To tease that out just a bit, he basically helped me make the connection between well-placed, appropriately timed, thought-provoking, questions and good decision-making, which was a good thing because good questions, good questions always lead to better decisions, and better decisions lead to fewer regrets.

This is why on the backside of a bad decision. On the backside of a bad decision it's not

unusual to hear someone say, in fact you may have said this, on the backside of a bad decision, "I should have asked more questions". We know intuitively, we know intuitively that the more questions we ask the more information we acquire, which leads to greater insight and hopefully better decisions. But pausing, you know this, pausing to ponder a list of potentially disruptive questions, well, it's just not easy and it's not even intuitive. The truth is most of us, me included, most of us resist uninvited questions when we're making a decision, right.

In fact, in the moment in the moment, uninvited questions make it feel like we're being questioned rather than simply being asked a question, and there's a big difference. And when we confuse, when we confuse one for the other, what happens? Our defenses go up and our learning aptitude goes down. Because it is virtually impossible, it is virtually impossible to welcome new information or new insight when we're convinced our judgment is being questioned. And this is especially true when we're making personal decisions, after all they're personal. Translated, "It is nobody's

business". Maybe, but again, most of our personal decisions, most of our personal decisions eventually impact and affect some other persons. It may be none of their business, but the results of our personal decisions often intersect with someone else's business, especially the folks closest to us.

So there's no getting around the fact, there is no getting around the fact that well-placed, appropriately timed, thought-provoking questions set us up for better decisions and fewer regrets. Now I'll tell you who is nodding in agreement about now. All the professional counselors out there. Isn't that right? All the professional counselors, if you'd raise your hand for just a minute. Yeah, I see you out there. Isn't it true? All the good counselors they get this, and great counselors you master this. Great counselors know that most of us are far more likely to follow through on decisions we make than decisions other people prescribe to us or for us. And to the point of counseling, we're far more prone to take our own advice than advice prescribed to us by someone else.

So a good counselor, and this is what drives you crazy about your counselor, a good counselor will never tell you what to do which is so frustrating. It's why I stopped doing counseling because I enjoy telling people what to do. And honestly, nobody ever did it. And I didn't have the time or the patience to do what great counselors do. And what do great counselors do? They scatter breadcrumbs. They scatter breadcrumbs all along our path to lead us in the direction of our best option. They scatter breadcrumbs along the path to lead us to that, you know, that aha moment of insight. And once we arrive, it's clear, it's so clear what we should do. And we're far more likely to do it because we arrived at it on our own, sort of. And the bread crumbs that they scatter all along our path, you know what they are? You guessed it. They are well-placed appropriately timed thought-provoking questions.

Now I experienced this firsthand, for the first time about 25 years ago. I was meeting with a counselor who was so incredibly good at this and two questions in particular he asked me at the perfect moment placed me squarely in front of the mirror to my soul, and I saw what I had



never seen before, and I didn't like it. And one of his questions actually compelled me to decide my life and my teaching, and really my whole approach to ministry and a completely different direction. In that moment I saw something in me, again, I'd never seen before, and you can't unsee something once you've seen it. And I've shared that story with you before. His other question, he asked me much later in our time together. And this question actually paved the way for reconciliation between my dad and me.

Steve, my counselor and I were actually walking around a quarter-mile track at a local high school, he learned that it was easier to talk to me when we were going somewhere rather than facing each other, that's the case for a lot of people. And I was going on and on as we walked around the track, I was going on and on about how frustrated I was, how frustrated I was, and Steve would always stop and say, "Andy frustration is just anger by another name". You're really angry. But see, I liked the word frustrated or frustration because it felt more Christian than anger, right. Anyway, so I'm going on and on and he'd heard it all before.

And suddenly we're walking around this track, he stops, he turns and he looks at me and he says, "Andy, let me ask you a question".

Now, I'd been meeting with Steve long enough to know that you don't answer quickly because the last time I answered a question quickly I stepped right into his counselor trap and had no choice, but to change. "Andy," he says, "let me ask you a question". We were talking about my relationship between me and my dad. He said this. He said, "Andy, how do you think your heavenly Father feels towards your father? Andy, how do you think your heavenly Father feels towards your," he actually said "earthly father". And in fact for some of you today this question is the reason you are watching or listening to this message because this question punctured my soul. He said, "How how do you think your heavenly Father feels toward your father, your earthly father, remembering," he'd said, "that your heavenly Father takes your father's entire life into account, how do you think he feels about him"? He said, "Do you think your heavenly Father, you think your Father, heavenly Father is frustrated with him, is angry with him"?

Now, of course, I knew the answer was no. Steve turns around and he just walks on, I'm, you know, hustling to catch up, and before I could answer the question out loud he stopped again and he turned to me and he said this. He said, "Andy, when you feel toward your father what you think your heavenly Father feels toward your father you'll know you're making progress. You'll know you're getting healthy". Wow, that was stunning. And suddenly I had something to aim for but suddenly I was confronted with how hard I had been working to maintain a perspective that justified my frustration, a perspective that, honestly, left me waiting for my dad to move in my direction before I took a step in his. And once again, I stepped right into his trap, a trap that would eventually set me free.

Now, when it comes progress, when it comes to making better decisions, avoiding regret it's hard to beat, this is why I told you that story. It is hard to be well-placed, appropriately timed, thought-provoking questions. So, what if you had the questions ahead of time? What if you had a list of

questions you could ask yourself when faced with an important decision? Questions to ask when you're stuck? Questions to ask when you're unsure, frustrated? Imagine having a list of questions that serve as a grid or like a filter to evaluate your options, even your emotions, even your responses and reactions? And the purpose of this series, honestly, is to give you the questions ahead of time. Not all of the questions, but five questions I'm convinced will result in better decisions and fewer regrets, If, if you ask, answer honestly and act on your answer. Essentially, what I wanna do is I wanna add five questions to your decision-making grid.

Now, I say, add because you already have some sort of grid that you run options through whenever you're making a decision. In fact, you use that grid every single day. You may not be aware of it, but you use it every single day. Every time you make a decision, you unconsciously ask some questions. Questions like, "Will I enjoy this? Will this hurt me? Will this hurt someone else? Will anyone find out"? And then our all-time favorite. "What's my out, if someone finds out"? Now, some

questions we ask ourselves are helpful, others, not so much. But the point is simply this, we already have a decision-making grid or template, and what I wanna do is I just wanna add five additional points of reference.

So, in parts two through six of the series we're gonna unpack each of the five questions beginning next week with the integrity question. But between now and then I wanna give you a bit of a homework assignment. I want you to commit a saying from the book of Proverbs to memory. It plays a really big part in all that's to come, and it's a verse that I memorized many, many years ago, it's a saying, I taught my kids before they were old enough to understand what it even meant. Sandra and I run decisions through this filter all the time. In fact, on one occasion, this one verse, and I'm not exaggerating, this one verse kept us, in terms of marriage, out of a really, really deep ditch.

Solomon writes, "The prudent see danger and take refuge. The prudent see danger and take refuge". This is a word we do not use very much, prudent. To be prudent means to be

crafty, to be shrewd, to be sensible. Are you crafty? Are you shrewd? Are you sensible? Do you know what crafty, shrewd and sensible people do? Crafty, shrewd and sensible people connect the dots, they live as if life is connected, that today's decisions determine tomorrow's options, and tomorrow's outcomes. That today's decisions show up in tomorrow's relationships. That today's reactions and responses have a way of smuggling themselves into our future.

So the prudent see danger, and when they see danger, they take refuge. When they realize that something up ahead is dangerous, when something up ahead has the potential to rob them of their preferred future, their future hopes and dreams, their future potential they respond appropriately. The prudent don't decide based on what's right in front of them. The prudent decide based on where they eventually want to be, relationally, financially, academically, professionally, physically, spiritually. "The prudent see danger and take refuge." The prudent see danger and take refuge,' But the simple," and here's the contrast, "but the simple," the simple minded,

the naive, the people who believe most anything, the simple are the people who approach life as if life is disconnected. They know better, they know better when they stop to think about it.

In fact, we all know better when we stop to think about it. But, the simple they just don't stop to think about it. So they don't take refuge instead, the text says, Solomon says "They just keep right on going, and as a result, they pay the penalty". Or the version that I memorized when I was younger and taught my kids says, "And they suffer for it". "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and they pay the penalty". They suffer for it.

Again, I wanna encourage you to commit this verse to memory because the five questions we're gonna discuss in this series, if you will incorporate them into your decision-making filter, they will slow you down and create the perspective that you need to see danger coming. And it will help create the margin you need to stop and think about it, to connect the dots, to put your passions, your desires, your fears

in proper perspective. These five questions actually are gonna serve as a reminder that life is connected. If you'll ask these five questions you will make better decisions and you will be better off. But, as a Jesus follower there's another important component to all of this, and we already touched on it.

If you'll ask these five questions consistently, not only will you make better decisions and live with fewer regrets, not only will you be better off, the people who look to you, who depend on you who needs you, they will be better off as well. In fact, everybody, everybody you come into contact with will be better off. And in this way, in this way this is what love requires of us. Because, once again, we're reminded it's not all about us. "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and they pay the penalty". So let's be prudent. Let's be prudent, let's make better decisions. After all our decisions, your decisions, our decisions determine the direction and the quality of our lives. And we will pick the discussion up right there next time in part two of "Better Decisions, Fewer Regrets".



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