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Joseph J. Battistone
Andrews University

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Making the Right Decision

By JOSEPH J. BATTISTONE

A STRIKE WAS INEVITABLE. Weeks at the bargaining table brought few results. The present contract was about to expire. It would be a slim chance for labor and management to come to an agreement within the next few days.

Bill Greenfield was faced with a real dilemma. Should the company employees strike, the factory would undoubtedly close down. Without his weekly check he couldn't pay his bills. He was nine months behind on payments from securing clear title to his car. He had an account at Sears and one with Standard Oil. He was still making payments on the loan he secured to finance the family vacation last summer. Each month he faced a house payment. But more important was the matter of feeding his family. Where would he get money for food?

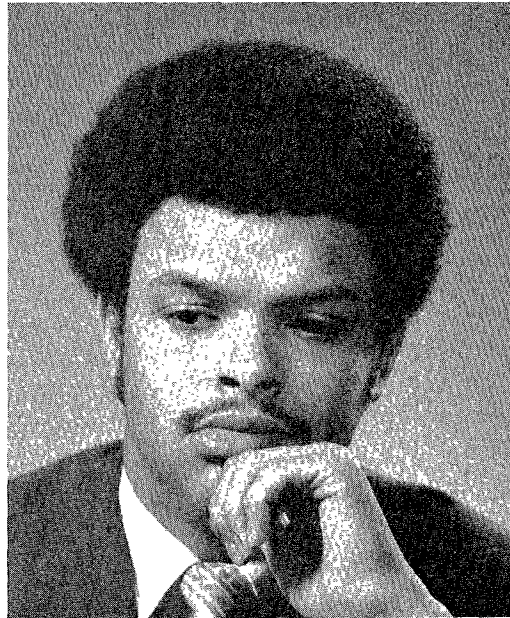
Overwhelmed with anxiety, Bill quit his job and moved to another city in search of employment that would be more secure. Several months elapsed before he discovered the cost of his move had been enormous. The company employees did strike. But the strike lasted only one week. The wages lost due to the strike were far less than Bill's moving expenses. His decision to quit his job turned out to be a poor one. Even worse was his decision to move.

Why is it that some persons go through life with a pattern of making bad decisions? Not every decision, of course, is a poor one. But most of the big ones that count have been poor. These mistakes seem to overshadow everything else these persons do. In despair they cry out, "Where did we go wrong?"

Perhaps they made a bad turn at a decisive moment. But often the dilemma is more complex. If we want to be certain that the decisions we make are right we must: (1) examine the decision-making process, (2) study the pattern we tend to follow when making decisions, and (3) evaluate ourselves in the light of our findings.

We need to discover what is involved in the process of making good decisions before we can determine whether particular decisions at a given moment are right. For example, in the light of the energy crisis, it is not difficult to see why many people are choosing to buy smaller cars. But for me to sell my car at a considerable loss in order to purchase a smaller automobile might be foolish. The threat of a snowfall may sell more snow tires than weeks of expensive advertising. Failure

Joseph J. Battistone, Ph.D., is associate professor of religion at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.



on an examination causes one student to drop out of school but another to study more diligently. A snide remark from a church member may drive one person out of church, but another into prayer. The circumstances surrounding each particular case are different, it is true. But more important are the patterns of response, which differ from person to person.

In addition to understanding the decision-making process, we need to be aware of the forces at work within us. Why are some persons cautious when making decisions, while others act impulsively? Is it always best to be cautious? Good bargains may be missed this way, golden opportunities lost, it is argued. Whether one is cautious or impulsive, one thing is certain: decisions, when studied, disclose certain patterns of response. These patterns have not been formed quickly, but are gradually developed. But they need not be viewed as a mystery. They can be identified and analyzed. The more clearly the patterns of response and the forces that shape them are discerned the more easily changes are made—if changes are indicated.

Finally, we need to make value judgments about ourselves—particularly in respect to decision-making. If we tend to be overly cautious or rash and impulsive, we should not be afraid or ashamed to admit it, express our disapproval, and seek to change. If instead we choose to be defensive about our behavior patterns there will be little hope for growth.

What then is involved in the process of making good decisions? From the Christian perspective, decision-making must take place in the context of a trust relationship with God. But what does God have to do with

my buying a pair of shoes? it may be asked. Or is it necessary to consult God as to where I should take my daughter on her birthday? Furthermore, if I were to make every decision a matter of extensive soul searching, I might become the world's number one procrastinator.

To speak of decision-making in the context of a relationship with God means that God is acknowledged as the center of our life. To speak of God as our center means that we accept His will and purpose as our guide. His Spirit then becomes the energizing force for decision-making.

Decision-making for the Christian involves a way of thinking and behaving essentially different from that of the world. This is because it originates in and develops from a religious philosophy of life. That is, the Christian's philosophy of life forms a framework for decision-making. This framework consists of our self-concept, our attitude toward life, and our set of values. Such a framework is not put together overnight but is built up gradually. The raw materials consist of a wide range of things. Behavioral tendencies inherited from our parents, early childhood experiences, and the tragedies and triumphs of life determine the shape and condition of this framework. The sturdier the framework, the more capable we will be in making right decisions.

If, for example, a person has difficulty understanding or accepting himself, he will have trouble making right decisions. He may even find it difficult to make decisions. Failure to develop positive self-concepts may contribute to a series of poor decisions about work, marriage, and life in general. In striking contrast should be the experience of the Christian; for his self-concept grows out of the realization that he is a child of God, a loving God who has a personal interest in him. As a child of God, he has a place in the universe. He belongs to it, and has a right to live in it, and enjoy it because he is God's child.

This could be misconstrued as representing an insidious form of selfishness. However, the Christian not only sees himself as God's child, but the rest of humanity as God's creation as well. Moreover, he sees the world not as a product of chance happenings but as created by God. It is not to be exploited for selfish purposes, but to be served to the glory of God. The Christian, then, views his life as a calling from God. This calling offers him a set of values important for decision-making. Such questions as "What kind of work should I do?" or "Whom shall I marry?" or "Where shall we live?" are raised and answered in the light of God's call. God's call, then, forms the framework for decision-making. This is the essential difference between the Christian and the person whose life does not center in God.

Center Shifts Without God

The person whose life does not center in God often finds his center constantly shifting. His life being in a state of flux, he makes decisions about what to do, where to live, whom to marry, in a whimsical fashion. To break the boredom of life he goes on a buying spree. Having no true center he becomes vulnerable to enticing advertisements. He observes other people who seem to be happy and then patterns his life around what he observes. His neighbor buys a new car. Perhaps it is time for him to trade his in. Fashions and fads become important. The desire for social acceptance may become overwhelming. Gradually he becomes a prisoner to the goals, ambitions, and designs of others. It becomes increasingly difficult for him to think and act independently. He cannot make decisions himself because his life is filled with many ambiguities.

Such a situation, as dismal as it may appear, is not hopeless, however. If a person really wants to change, he can. A change will take place when he turns to God—change in the sense of growth and development. We must truly desire to center our life in God and to have Him become our center.

What does it mean to center one's life in God? Put briefly, it means to become a person of integrity, courage, and confidence. These objectives, when pursued in faith, become accessible by God's grace.

To be a person of integrity requires total submission to the will of God. God is to govern more than a segment of our personality. Our entire life must fall under His influence. Moreover, we will examine our life carefully to determine areas of vulnerability. This examination will be an honest, open, and thorough one. We will learn to distinguish between wants and needs, lust and love, pride and respect, shame and humility.

To be a person of courage means that we will act upon the evidence we discovered in our self-examination. Some prefer the easier way: they resign their future to fate. In so doing they think they escape from the responsibilities of decision-making. That, of course, is not possible. It takes courage to face defeats instead of running from them. It takes courage to try again until our failures become victories. The Christian has no alternative but to be courageous. Cowards do not make good decisions. Neither do they make good Christians. Finally, the Christian is a person with confidence. He moves toward the future with unflinching confidence in God. If God is the center of his life then every decision he makes will be an expression of trust in Him, a vote of confidence in divine providence. Even when he walks through the valley of disappointments and defeats he will not break this trust, because he knows through his own experience that God is leading. And when God is leading, the Christian is bound to make the right decisions. □

The Top Without a String

By PRISCILLA WILBERT

Lord, it must seem strange to You
The things we modern Christians do.

This rapid pace, it never ends;
I really have no time for friends.

With all the duties I've incurred—
There's just no time to read Your Word.

The Sabbath, Lord, Your holy day?
I usually sleep those hours away.

It costs so much these days to live;
I've nothing for the church to give.

I've lots to do that will not wait;
I can't slow down to meditate.

As You can see, I'm in a spin.
Don't worry, Lord, I'll work You in.