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Choose Life
Deuteronomy 30:15-20

These words are not just good words—
these are the ***final words, the final sermon*** of Moses to the people of Israel,
just as they are about to enter the promised land.

Have you ever heard ***someone's final words?***
It's very humbling and powerful—
because usually they are words right from that person's ***heart***—
to loved ones, family and friends.
Often people talk of their ***love, their forgiveness,***
their hopes for the loved ones' future.

That's what Moses is doing right here,
and his focus is talking about ***God's love, God's grace,***
God's hope for the peoples' future.

Moses is also setting before them a ***choice***—
and it all boils down to something very simple:
choose life or death, blessings or curses.

He's not saying that if you disobey you'll just suffer,
but rather that ***all our choices have consequences.***
We know that to be true, don't we?

I don't believe there's a formula in life, like that I have health issues because
I've disobeyed God...and I don't think that Moses is saying that.
We just live in an imperfect world with imperfect bodies and relationships.
Bad stuff happens to good people.
All the time.

I do think Moses is focused on the ***natural consequences of our choices.***
Do you know what I'm talking about?
My divorce from my kids' father—that has consequences that last a lifetime,
for me and for them.

And thankfully it has helped me in my recent life to make better choices.

What are choices that you've made,

and how did you reap the consequences?

The good news is that I believe we can ***learn*** from our mistakes, don't you?

I sure hope so!

I think that's a part of the gospel! Amen?

Moses is saying ***we do have choices*** for so many things in life, especially the things we ***follow, believe in, and worship.***

He's very focused on ***false worship***—

in the preceding chapter he warns the people against worshiping ***idols***, because that has some very bad consequences.

And it happens to be a temptation they give in to—a lot!

Now we may not have golden calves in our homes

(ok well maybe someone does, but that's a different conversation...)

But we are ***all faced with temptations*** to follow after, to believe in, to covet or worship things besides our loving God, aren't we?

Just think about the way TV and the web

are always showing us ***ads***---things that we supposedly can't live without.

If we get caught up in those ads,

we can end up giving our hearts to stuff, which is false worship.

Just think about the way that the world ***portrays relationships*** these days.

Think about all the TV shows about finding a mate, or living with someone, or dating...it's pretty scary.

What if we believe that's the way to love one another?

Yikes!

Just think about how easy it is ***to want, to covet, someone else's life***—their home, their car, their financial situation, even their family.

It's really easy to fall into that trap,

and then you find yourself more focused on wanting what they have, than on being grateful for what God has given you!

I struggle with that, do you?

So Moses' main point, right there in verse 19, is this:

Choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!

Choose life.

When you think about that little statement, it is very ***powerful***.

Choose life.

So how we do choose life?

Moses goes on, to tell us what he means, in verse 20:

Choosing life means ***three things***:

loving God, ***obeying*** God, and ***holding fast*** to God.

What do those mean to you?

How ***do you love, obey, and hold fast*** to God in your daily life?

For me, ***loving God*** means I take time to read ***a devotional and scripture*** every day—not just for the upcoming sermon, but for my heart and soul.

I have books that are great for this at my house and on my desk here,

I also have Bible apps and the Streams in the Desert right on my phone,

so I am never without an encouraging word!

How ***do you actively love*** God every day?

I would love to hear from you on this!

I think it's great for us to share our ideas and experiences—it's encouraging!

For me, ***obeying God*** means I do what the Lord says is required in ***Micah 6:8***:

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord my God.

It means following the ***Great Commandment*** of Jesus,

it means sticking to those tried and true ***ten commandments***,

and the great ***Shema*** of Deuteronomy 6.

What does it mean to you?

How ***do you obey*** God day by day?

For me ***holding fast*** means I plug into the ***Holy Spirit's power***.

You know whenever I'm called to my work as the ***Fire Chaplain***

for the Limestone Fire Department,

I ask the Holy Spirit ***to use me***.

That's a very simple but powerful prayer—***use me, Lord***.

I don't know what I'm walking into,

I don't know if the people I meet will even any kind of faith,

but I rely upon my faith to be their chaplain,

to listen and comfort to the best of my ability.

When I am called out to see you, I pray something similar—

God, please fill me, open me, and speak through me.

After all, each visit is unique, each person has their special challenges and their own way of following God,

and I must depend on the Holy Spirit to work through me.

Only God knows what will be most comforting and loving—***there's no formula*** for that—so I have to pray and be open.

How ***do you hold fast*** to God?

How do you ***plug into the source*** of all life and power—our loving, gracious God?

And what about ***ordinary daily activities***—

how do we know which ones are ***choosing life***?

What if we just hold them up to God's ***Word***?

What if we do those activities with ***prayer***?

I can think of lots of actions that choose life.

In my kitchen I have a sign that says ***Live Simply, Laugh Often, Love Always.***

That seems like good advice—what do you think?

Living, laughing, loving, that is choosing life, isn't it?

And what about ***enjoying*** time off, or ***playing*** with children?

What about ***learning*** a new skill,

or ***making*** a new spiritual practice a part of your daily life?

What about the ***basics of faith***—worshipping, praying, reading, and believing?

When we do those things, ***we choose life***, right?

Think right now, about ***how you can choose life***—today, this week, this year...

These words—choose life—they are ***not just for us as individuals.***

They are also our call as a ***church family.***

We are called to choose life—together.

How do you think we do that?

What if we consider what makes a healthy, thriving church?

One pastor Carey Nieuwhof had

5 suggestions for churches that want to thrive,

and I think these are all ways that **churches choose life!**

I need to thank Amy because I think she first saw this online.

The first is about **attitude:**

Churches that want to live have a **we can** vs. **we can't** mentality.

Because to be honest, **both things are true** if you believe them, aren't they?

You **can** if you believe that---or you **can't** if you are sure you'll fail.

The future is all about attitude!

A **we can** attitude also means you're relying on God

to do what seems impossible.

Thriving churches make a way where there's no way,

which is something God specializes in!

What about us?

Do we believe that **we can**—or do we have a **negative** attitude about what is possible in this church?

The second suggestion for churches is also about attitude.

It's a **them vs. us** attitude—if we want to live,

we have to work for and live for '**them**'—the people outside our church.

Many of us have heard the adage, *the church is the only organization that exists for those who are not members.*

That's our call, friends.

Living churches **focus on the people we want to serve,**

the people we want to reach.

Dying churches focus on their **own members,**

everything is about what we want,

not what is best for reaching our community, or making new disciples.

How are we doing in this area?

Are we focused on us or on them—that world out there?

This is a challenging question because we do a lot of things

because our members want it.

But I see us taking on the **right attitude when we embark** on things like

continuing the Youth Café, and when we think about what types of service and

mission would reach our community and not just what we'd like.

The third suggestion for a thriving church is to live for

Principles vs. preferences.

Dying churches focus on what the people in the church like or don't like, they spend a lot of time and energy to make people in the church ***happy***.

We all know how easy it is to fall into this trap, right?

We hear people say they don't like certain parts of worship, or activities, and so we feel like everything needs to change according to our preferences.

But is that making disciples?

Is that reaching out into the world the way Jesus sent us at the end of Matthew's Gospel?

What if we ***stuck with the principles*** we feel are most important, and in this church that means our mission statement—which is Jesus' Greatest Commandment: *to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.*

What if ***everything we did as a church*** was held up to that standard?

Wouldn't that help us have some perspective on life, and what we do or don't like?

Disliking a particular hymn is really not as important when compared to how ***we love and treat each other***, right?

The fourth way that a church can thrive is by being

Proactive vs. reactive.

We want to be ***proactive***—and set out goals and missions—frameworks for what we do and what we believe,

Instead of just reacting to problems and issues as they arise.

Now, this doesn't mean we don't respond to real needs and issues, rather it's a change of focus.

The question is: are we going to really ***forge ahead with that great commandment*** of loving God and neighbor—

and ***how*** are we going to do that?

Or are we just happy to not move forward and stagnate, responding only when things pop up?

The final attitude of thriving churches is

Thinking ***now vs. eventually.***

“If you want to be effective, you act.
 If you want to be ineffective, you don’t.
 Talk without action has little value. And too many churches specialize in talk.”

This is hard for churches, because it’s **hard to embrace change** and new activities—we usually prefer to just keep things the same. We want what is **comfortable and familiar**, don’t we? This is true for most of us as individuals, too, isn’t it?

But if we want to choose life—we have to choose to do those activities and missions and service that need to be done **right now, not someday**. It’s far too easy to say we’ll do that when we have more members, or more money, or more space. It takes courage to say, I don’t know how we can make it happen, but with God’s help we are going to do this new thing!

I think **we are acting on faith** in a few areas of our church right now, we are doing things now, not waiting til eventually we have the resources. Carey Nieuwhof, October 27, 2015, churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/265066-5-significant-attitude-differences-that-separate-growing-and-declining-churches.html

Those five things,
Can instead of can’t,
Them instead of us,
Principles instead of preferences,
Proactive instead of reactive,
Now instead of eventually---
 these are some **good words** for each one of us, and our church.

They cut to the heart of what it means **to choose life**. You know, **Moses** was an amazing leader. He was human, he was imperfect, he was a criminal who ran away from his crime and tried to live a quiet life....until God found him in that burning bush. He thought he couldn’t return to Egypt, and God made him the leader. He was afraid to speak up, but God used him to free the people from slavery in Egypt!

Moses' words to those people as they enter the promised land, are ***still powerful words*** for us today.

Listen again to what he has to say:

Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live.

Choose life.

That's something we all need to hear.

I'd say that's some ***Good News of the Gospel*** today, wouldn't you?

May God give us the ***power*** and ***courage***

to ***choose life, each and every day.***

Amen.