

Ben Langford: 6/23/20

I Choose Life

Over the past several months, I have had a lot of time to reflect. I did not spend time reflecting on the future, which I often do, making plans and dreaming about what may come. I did not spend much time reflecting on the past, being nostalgic and reminiscing about good days gone by. I spent time reflecting on myself, the choices I make - the way I treat my wife, the way I respond to my children, the way I interact with my neighbors. The choices I make are not just about me. They concern others and because they concern others they concern God. My choices are about life. It reminds me of God's call in Deuteronomy 30:19 - "This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life..."

I have also been reflecting on the fruits of the Holy Spirit. I typically think of the fruits of the Spirit as gifts, and they are, but they are also a choice. When I choose the fruits that the Spirit offers, I choose the Holy Spirit. And when I choose the Holy Spirit I choose life. "Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life..." (Deut. 30:19-20).

It has been a long time since I have read the eloquent writing of Max Lucado, but there is one short piece that has stuck with me for more than 20 years. Below is that piece with my own additions italicized. Before you and I is life. I want to choose life. I want to choose the Holy Spirit, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. "For the Lord is your life..." Will you choose life with me today?

I choose love. No occasion justifies hatred; *nothing done to me* warrants bitterness. I choose love. Today I will love God and what God loves.

I choose joy. I will invite my God to be the God of circumstance. I will refuse the temptation to be cynical... the tool of the lazy thinker. I will refuse to see people as anything less than human beings, created by God, *lives that matter, gifts to be celebrated*. I will refuse to see any problem as anything less than an opportunity to see God *and joyfully work towards God's vision for creation*.

I choose peace. I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live. *I will work for peace so that life is possible*.

I choose patience. I will overlook the inconveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite Him to do so. Rather than complain that the wait is too long, I will thank God for a moment to pray. Instead of clenching my fist at *challenges and hardships*, I will face them with *faithfulness* and courage.

I choose kindness. I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me.

I choose goodness. I will go without a dollar before I take a dishonest one. I will be overlooked before I will boast. I will confess before I will accuse. I choose goodness.

I choose faithfulness. Today I will keep my promises. My debtors will not regret their trust. My associates will not question my word. My wife will not question my love. And my children will never fear that their father will not come home.

I choose gentleness. Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice, may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.

I choose self-control. *There are so many things that I cannot control, but the Spirit offers me self-control.* I choose self-control. *I can choose how I view people - as God does. I can choose how I respond to people - with loving kindness. I can choose how I respond to God - with obedience.* I choose self-control.

Set before me is life and death. I Choose Life.