

Decision Making

Faithful decision making is an important life skill. It is worth practicing with our Sunday school and CYC kids.

The process begins with a problem. The problem demands a decision, whether we like it or not. And decisions have outcomes. In many cases, the outcomes are beyond our ability to control; they can even introduce new problems. Faith has to steer a steady course through this labyrinth of unpredictable events.

From his conversion onward, the Apostle Paul shows us what it is like to live by faith. He has hopes and frustrations. He deals with disappointments. He deals with persecution and suffering. He shows us that there are times to act; in fact, there are times to act quickly and decisively. He also shows us that there are times not to act, when everything has to be left completely in God's hands. In every case, Paul makes faithful decisions that are born out of a godly conscience. His love for Christ constrains him to do the right thing. And through it all God is with him every step of the way.

The point of this activity is to look at several experiences in the life of the Apostle Paul and consider what it took for him to make the faithful decisions that he did. May God help us and our children to become imitators of Paul as he imitated Christ.

Read the Bible passages that define each of the following decision making events in Paul's life. Then do the bullet point activities that go with them. Don't rush. Let your students think about the questions. If it helps, let them write answers on a piece of paper before you open the question for group discussion.

You're Paul. What will you do? Acts 13 to 28

There are five parts to this decision-making activity. Each part begins on a separate page.

You're Paul. What will you do? – Acts 13

(1) The quitter!

"Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John (Mark) left them and returned to Jerusalem." – Acts 13:13.

- It is early in Paul's missionary work and John Mark quits. Why might he do this? Brainstorm a list of possible reasons for John Mark's actions.
- You're Paul. How would you feel about this set back?

Explain how you feel when someone lets you down.

- You're Paul. You're now a man short. The work just got harder. You can give up, scale back, or press on. What will you do? Explore possible outcomes for each of these options.
- What did Paul do? Why? And what were the outcomes? Support your answers from Acts 13 and related passages.

You're Paul. What will you do? – Acts 16

(2) Is this what I was hoping for?

"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." – Acts 16:9-10.

- You're Paul. You have every reason to believe that this is a genuine call from God, so you go. What are your expectations as you set out for Macedonia? Brainstorm a list of results you might expect to come from this journey and why.

"They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, 'These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.' The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." – Acts 16:19-24.

- You're Paul. Is this what you expected? Do you still believe that God called you to Macedonia? What might you be thinking at this point?
- You're Paul and you are in prison. You are literally up against a wall. What are your options now? Make a list of things you might do in a situation like this.
- What did Paul do? Why? And what were the outcomes? Support your answers from Acts 16.

You're Paul. What will you do? – Acts 16

(3) To act or not to act?

"And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped." – Acts 16:26-27.

- You're Paul. Suddenly and unexpectedly you are faced with two challenges that demand split-second decisions: (1) You are a free man, will you make a run for it and try to escape from prison?

Think through the possible consequences of running and not running. How might you be affected in each case? How might others be affected?

- Did Paul run or not, and what were the results of his decision? Support your answers from Acts 16.
- A second challenge follows as quickly as the first: (2) The jailer assumes that everyone has escaped and draws his sword to kill himself. You don't owe him any favors. Will you stand by and let him take his own life, or will you act instantly and try to stop him?

What does it take to make a quick decision, one way or the other? What happens if you delay?

- What did Paul do, and what does this tell us about his character? What were the results of his decision? Support your answers from Acts 16.

You're Paul. What will you do? – Acts 20

(4) To go or not to go?

"I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem."
– Romans 15:25-26.

- You're Paul. You are determined to help your poor brethren in Jerusalem. Is this a worthy cause? Explain.

There are many good causes in the world. Why place a high priority on this one? How might you expect God to bless your efforts?

"And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me." – Acts 20:22-23.

- You're Paul. You are going to Jerusalem on a mission of mercy. Is this what you want for your efforts?

What would you do if you knew ahead of time that a mission of mercy you wanted to carry out would also be dangerous? Would it be foolish to go ahead or not?

What factors would make you decide to go ahead?

You're Paul. What will you do? – Acts 23-28

(5) The rocky road to Rome!

"The following night the Lord stood by (Paul) and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.'" – Acts 23:11.

- You're Paul. You have wanted to preach the gospel in Rome for a long time. Now the Lord makes it clear to you that you will do it. Is this your ticket for a quick and easy ride to Rome?

Consider the four previous situations. What have your experiences taught you:
(1) about the realities of life? (2) about what you can and cannot expect in life?
(3) about knowing when it is time to act and when it is time not to act? (4) about the reliability of God in every situation? (5) about yourself?

- You're Paul. What will the road to Rome be like?

Read Acts 24:24-27. How are you going to handle a two-year delay? What will be going on in your mind during this time?

Read Acts 27. Identify specific times when the course of your life is determined by someone else's decisions? Are you always the master of your own life? Is this good or bad?

Peruse Acts 27:1 to 28:10. Identify specific things that Paul does to act faithfully and make the best of circumstances over which he has no control.

Is God in control? How do you know?