

The 10 Best
Decisions a
Man Can
Make

Bill Farrel



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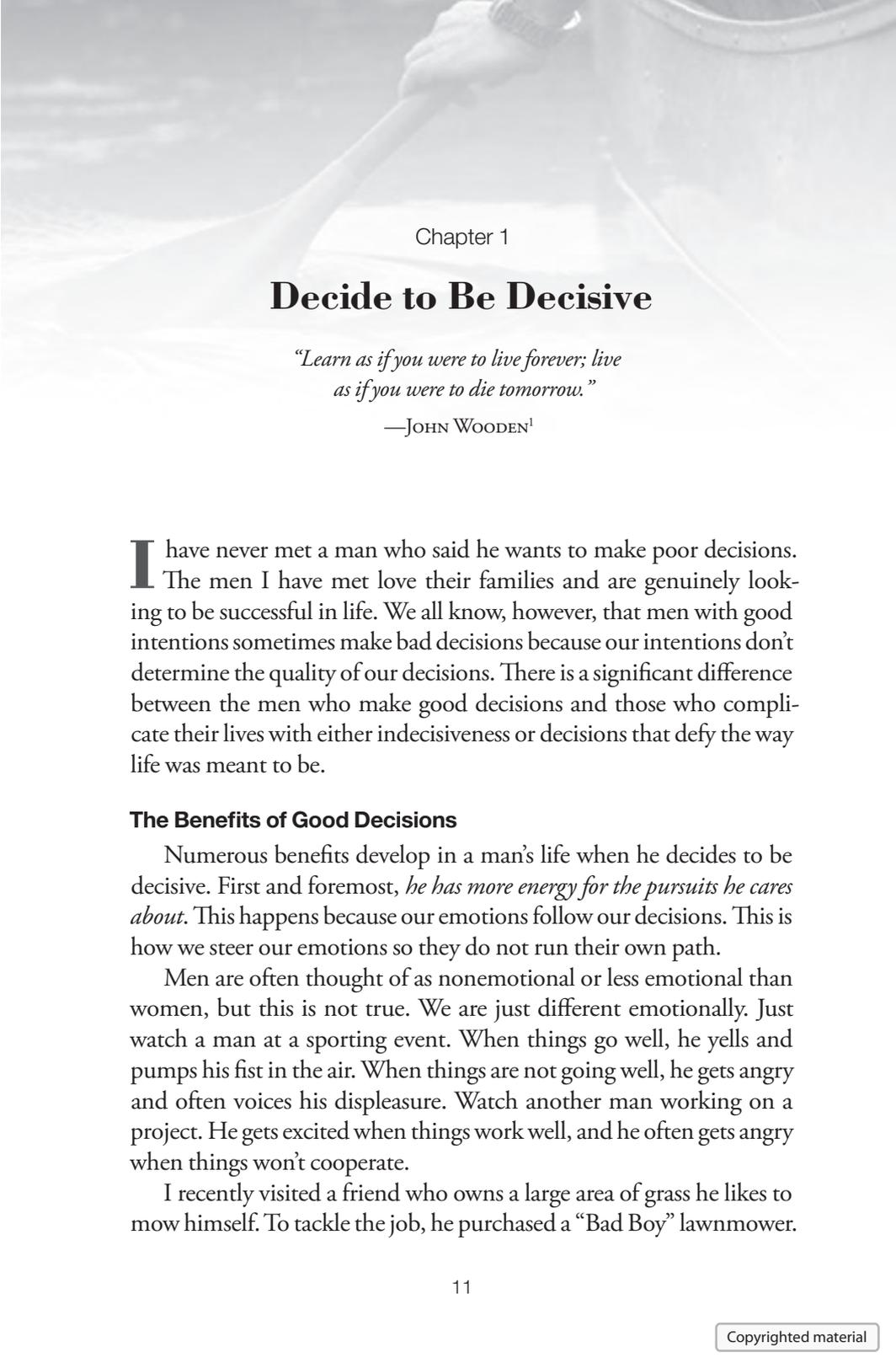
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Chapter 1

Decide to Be Decisive

*“Learn as if you were to live forever; live
as if you were to die tomorrow.”*

—JOHN WOODEN¹

I have never met a man who said he wants to make poor decisions. The men I have met love their families and are genuinely looking to be successful in life. We all know, however, that men with good intentions sometimes make bad decisions because our intentions don't determine the quality of our decisions. There is a significant difference between the men who make good decisions and those who complicate their lives with either indecisiveness or decisions that defy the way life was meant to be.

The Benefits of Good Decisions

Numerous benefits develop in a man's life when he decides to be decisive. First and foremost, *he has more energy for the pursuits he cares about*. This happens because our emotions follow our decisions. This is how we steer our emotions so they do not run their own path.

Men are often thought of as nonemotional or less emotional than women, but this is not true. We are just different emotionally. Just watch a man at a sporting event. When things go well, he yells and pumps his fist in the air. When things are not going well, he gets angry and often voices his displeasure. Watch another man working on a project. He gets excited when things work well, and he often gets angry when things won't cooperate.

I recently visited a friend who owns a large area of grass he likes to mow himself. To tackle the job, he purchased a “Bad Boy” lawnmower.

It came complete with a Caterpillar diesel motor and has a zero degree turn radius. He had that “this is really manly” look on his face as he said to me, “This mower’s motto is, ‘We cut with attitude,’ and I can mow grass at 15 miles per hour with this Bad Boy.” Just to prove his point, he fired up the mower, proceeded to burn out the tires, and turned circles in his shed. It was an impressive machine that elicited an emotional and manly response.

I am convinced that Karl is free to be enthused and full of energy because he is an excellent decision-maker. He has, for years, channeled his energy into a productive, balanced, and inspiring life.

Decisions also make us more efficient. Some people follow the mistaken notion that says, “We never have time to do a thing right, but we always have time to do it over.” It is just more efficient to choose well from the outset.

Decisions simplify our lives. Our lives are an interconnected web of relationships. Decisions that are compatible with the way God designed life make relationships work better, create fewer negative consequences, and minimize the situations we need to clean up after the fact. As a result, good decisions develop a life where relationships need less maintenance and recovery from complicated interactions.

Healthy decisions raise your confidence level. Any time you are convinced that you are doing what you were designed to do, your focus, dedication, and motivation are high. There is simply no hesitation. You do what needs to be done. You say what needs to be said. You research what you do not know, and you get into action. There is no second guessing, no what-ifs, and no overanalysis.

When it comes to decisions, there are three categories of men:

- Those who operate in HD (Healthy Decisions). These men mostly make decisions that are healthy and lead to productive, relationally satisfying outcomes.
- Those who operate in UD (Unhealthy Decisions). The decisions these men make are mostly unhealthy and short-sighted. They often find themselves in complicated situations and awkward relationships.

- Those who operate in ND (Nondecisions). These men allow others to make decisions for them or they avoid making choices and let life turn out however it wants to. This approach leads to codependent relationships, under-achieving, emotional turmoil, missed opportunities, and immature interactions.

Men fall into several traps that slow the process of personal growth and keep them from healthy decisions:

- They let others make decisions for them that they should be making for themselves.
- They blame poor decisions on others.
- They decide they don't need to make changes because "that's the way they've always been."
- They make excuses for not making decisions.
- They refuse to set priorities that could guide their decisions.
- They are too lazy to make the effort it takes.
- They give in to peer pressure rather than deciding what is best.
- They are not honest about the changes they know deep down need to be made.

Which of these traps are you most susceptible to?

The journey of our lives is filled with decisions. Every day we must make decisions about what food we will eat, how we will spend our time, and who we will spend that time with. Most of these decisions are minor in nature, but they come in rapid fashion. One result of the information age is a never-ending stream of data that requires almost constant decision-making.

Strategic decision-making makes life more efficient and gives momentum to your pursuit of God's will. Insufficient decision-making complicates your life and robs you of energy and opportunities. Notice the priority of decision-making in Deuteronomy 30:19-20:

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. *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, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God challenged His people to pay attention and make decisions that protect and enhance our lives. He knows that life is made up of one vital decision after another. Every day you are faced with life and death decisions, and you must be determined to choose well if you are to avoid situations that can destroy everything you have worked to establish.

I got a stark reminder of this truth in a phone call from my son Zachery.

“Dad, I am so mad right now.”

“Really, what’s up?”

“I just got in an accident.”

“Oh man, are you all right?”

“Yeah, but I am really mad.”

“Why are you so mad?”

“Because I never saw him coming. I had the green light and he totally ran the red light.”

It turned out it wasn’t quite as simple as he described to me. He was turning left at one of those intersections that has a combination traffic signal. At the beginning of the cycle, there is a left arrow that directs people in the turn lane to proceed. It then turns to a green light with a reminder, “left turn yield to traffic on green light.” Well, the light had changed but Zach didn’t notice. At the same time, the other driver assumed everything was clear so he never slowed down as he entered the intersection. The pictures were sickening. My son was driving a full-sized Dodge Ram pickup. The other vehicle was a Jeep Grand Cherokee. The front of the Jeep plowed into the passenger side fender of the Dodge. The front wheel ended up where the engine should be. The engine was pointing 45 degrees in the wrong direction and the

fender was totally collapsed. The bumper was catapulted onto the sidewalk, and the cab of the truck was barely recognizable.

My son's massive, tough, seemingly indestructible truck was completely totaled and reduced to a pile of pathetic scrap metal and spare parts. All because two men were not alert for a moment in time. It didn't take long. It didn't involve any advanced planning. But it could have changed my son's life for the rest of his days—or ended his life because it was a life-and-death decision. He chose poorly, but, fortunately for him, the only thing that was broken up was his truck.

The next time you are unexpectedly faced with a life-and-death decision, what will you choose?

The most common method for making decisions is to do so by instinct. You are faced with a decision. Your instincts kick into gear based upon your life experience and your emotional programming. A decision “occurs” to you that feels right. In the absence of any other decisions that seem better, you commit to this course of action.

Frank Crane comments on the drawbacks of this accidental approach to decision-making: “Most of the things we decide are not what we know to be the best. We say yes, merely because we are driven into a corner and must say something.”² But Sigmund Freud actually encouraged this type of decision-making:

When making a decision of minor importance, I have always found it advantageous to consider all the pros and cons. In vital matters, however, such as the choice of a mate or a profession, the decision should come from the unconscious, from somewhere within ourselves. In the important decisions of personal life, we should be governed, I think, by the deep inner needs of our nature.³

If the emotional programming of your life is healthy, these natural decisions can be strong and effective. If, however, the emotional programming is flawed or underdeveloped, these natural decisions are generally shortsighted and lead to complicated results.

You Can Decide to Be Different

This was one of the first things I encountered in my own journey. My

home was characterized by a lot of fear. My mom was afraid of people, bugs, driving, and anything that allowed others to be involved in our lives. In her attempts to control her life, she would get angry, depressed, or long-winded. She could lecture for hours, erupt in anger, or hide for days.

As the youngest in my family, I watched my older brother and sister fight with my mom. I concluded that approach didn't work, so I went the other direction and grew numb. I wasn't aware of it when I was growing up, but as an adult, I began to realize that I was programmed to grow numb under stress and to grow stubborn around anyone who doesn't make sense to me. Since most decisions involve some level of stress, and often involve people who share differing opinions, this was a problem.

Early in my adult years, I discovered that helping people was what I liked most, but I was trained to isolate myself and not to trust people. I was skilled as a kid at spending long periods of time by myself avoiding the stress of my mom's fear. As a result, I had an ongoing argument within myself. My desire would say, *Invite people over. Have dinner together. Watch sporting events together. Have a Bible study in your home.* My instincts would push back, *You don't know what they might do. You don't know if you can really trust them. They might find out too much about your life and use it against you.*

As a result, I noticed a big gap between what I wanted to do and what I was actually doing. It even showed up in the car I drove. I wanted to drive a cool car. I dreamed of a car with a powerful engine, awesome styling, and a great paint job. Instead, I drove a green 1972 Chevrolet Vega with a blue back door. It had a blue door because I broke the back window carrying a woodshop project, and it was cheaper to get a door at the junkyard than to replace the window. Besides, I had plans to paint the car.

I had read the reports about the aluminum block that tended to crack when it overheated, but I was convinced it would not happen to me. I read books about how to "hot rod" your Vega. I read articles about how to put a V-8 motor in this pocket rocket, and I dreamed of having a car that would be the envy of my friends. I had plans, but they never turned into decisions. So I just kept driving my Vega. All my friends noticed, but not for the reasons I was hoping.

We, however, are not required to make decisions by instinct. We have been equipped with the ability to discern a wise course of action in each decision of our lives. We have been given the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), and we can utilize that ability to make effective decisions. As WWII hero William Foster says, “Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.”⁴

Go Big

Healthy decisions cause growth in our lives. With each passing year, we are faced with challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities that seemingly are bigger and more demanding than the year before. Healthy decisions move us forward step-by-step so that each year we are prepared for what comes our way. The real complications in life come when our maturity does not match our challenges.

I used to think that some people were born with the ability to recognize and pursue healthy decisions while others were doomed to miss strategic decisions or make shortsighted choices. If that were the case, I was sure I had been left out of the group that was born to be strategic. I have since discovered that anytime we are faced with a decision, we can perform a number of tests that give guidance, clarity, and confidence to the process.

Decision-making Skill 1: The Obvious Test

When you are faced with a decision, it’s helpful to determine if this is a simple decision or a more complicated choice. Before you put a lot of effort into any decision, ask yourself, “Is this decision so obvious that I am wasting time thinking about it?” The reason these decisions are obvious is that God has already clearly spoken to these areas of life or they are generally accepted as the best practices. If you put too much into these decisions, you get needlessly sidetracked and train yourself to stall when you ought to push forward. Consider these obvious decisions based on the best practices in life:

- Brush your teeth every day.
- Dress appropriately for work.

- If a police car pulls up behind you and turns its lights on, pull over.
- Get a good night's sleep regularly.
- If a friend of yours is in the hospital, go visit him.
- If a friend or family member gives you a gift, say, "Thank you."

Here are some of the most obvious decisions we face as men that have been clearly directed by the one who made us:

- Input God's Word into your mind in some way every day (Romans 12:2; Psalm 1:1-3).
- Choose what is good over what is evil (Romans 12:9).
- When faced with sexual temptation, run away (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). Don't pray about it or investigate it, run away.
- When you want to worry, pray more intensely (Philippians 4:6-7).
- In the midst of every situation, find a way to give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- Confess sin as soon as you are aware of it (1 John 1:9). Don't explain it or justify it, confess it.
- Choose your friends wisely (1 Corinthians 15:33).
- If a friend asks you to lie for him, just say no (Colossians 3:9-10).

When you train yourself to do the obvious, you develop habits in your life that become automatic. These habits make your life more efficient as they conserve your energy for more complex choices. They also raise your confidence level as success in simple tasks builds a track record of encouragement for the decisions that are not as obvious.

It's amazing to watch how this test affects men's lives. Terrance has a remarkable amount of unrealized potential because he refuses to follow this test. He is gifted in mechanical abilities and is one of the most

likeable men I have ever known. People just love to be around him because his personality puts them at ease and they are fascinated by his knowledge of how things work. He simply refuses to stay consistent with the obvious choices in his life.

Terrance often gets caught up in projects and arrives home much later than he was expected. His wife would be okay with it if he would call home and let her know, but he never calls. He promises to attend his kids' activities, but then gets carried away with one of his ventures and arrives just as the activity is ending. He has experimented with illegal stimulants, which severely complicate his most important relationships. His wife doesn't trust him when it comes time to make important decisions. They discuss them at length, his suggestions are often ignored, and he has to spend an enormous amount of energy to convince her that his ideas are valid. He often just lets her decide because it is exhausting to negotiate with her.

Tom, on the other hand, has the habits of his life dialed in. He runs four or five times per week. He has a scheduled date with his wife every week. He wakes up early enough to spend 10 to 15 minutes with Jesus, reading his Bible and praying, before going to work. He has simply trained himself to do the obvious things as soon as he is aware of them. When Tom and I talk, we explore subjects such as, "How do we impact our generation to live better lives? How can we help our kids be the best they can be? How do we help our wives through the current transition in their lives?"

Terrance and I have conversations about how to survive in a changing world; Tom and I have conversations about how to change the world.

Make the obvious decision when it is obvious.

A party of suppliers was being given a tour of a mental hospital. One of the visitors had made some insulting remarks about the patients. After the tour the visitors were introduced to various staff members in the canteen. The rude visitor chatted with one of the security staff, Bill, a kindly and wise ex-policeman.

"Are they all raving loonies in here then?" said the rude man.

"Only the ones who fail the test," said Bill.

"What's the test?"

“Well, we show them a bath full of water, a bucket, a jug, and an egg-cup, and we ask them what’s the quickest way to empty the bath.”

“Oh I see, simple—the normal ones know it’s the bucket, right?”

“No actually,” said Bill, “the normal ones say pull out the plug. Should I check when there’s a bed free for you?”⁵

Decision-making Skill 2: The Wisdom Test

In the space below, write down your thoughts about this question, “What is the difference between being smart and being wise?”

Not all decisions are obvious. Most of the decisions we must make require some level of discussion, deliberation, and discernment. This is why the Bible puts such a high value on wisdom, which is the ability to apply what is true to the situations of our lives in a skillful and beneficial way.

In this information age we live in, most people are not even aware of the vast amounts of information they casually discuss every day. For instance, I was talking with my youngest son the other day about a new video game he had rented. In the conversation, he referred to medieval knights and the commercial practices of medieval street vendors. He talked about swords, scabbards, spears and how they compare with ninja swords, M-16s, and incendiary explosive devices (IEDs). He also commented on computer graphics, CPU processing speed, and the meaning of the Eden treasures that were part of the pursuit in his game. He talked about all this so casually that he never realized how much more he knows at his age than any generation before him.

Knowledge, however, is much different than wisdom. My son still has trouble monitoring his schedule, managing his bank account, and trying to decide what college to attend. He often gets distracted by pursuits he loves at the expense of priorities that make his life more effective. He is intelligent, but he is still developing wisdom that matches his intelligence.

The path for developing wisdom is decorated with questions. Wise people ask questions with a sincere desire to find answers they can apply to real life. They know they will not get all their questions answered, and they are aware that their questions will change as they gain new insight and adjust to the truth they have applied to life. James 1:5 challenges all of us, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” The day you stop asking is the day you stop growing in wisdom.

Jesus asked His followers questions to encourage the development of wisdom. He was interested in guiding them into a deeper understanding of who He was, so He asked, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” After they answered, He asked, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:13-16). He wanted them to make the issue personal so they would make a decision.

When Jesus encountered two blind men in Matthew 20, He asked them, “What do you want me to do for you?” He had the power to heal them, and He knew He would grant them their miracle, but He wanted them to make a decision. He knew that a life with sight would require them to be more responsible than when they were blind, so He wanted them to be fully invested in the new lifestyle that would be theirs.

I would never say there is only one reason Jesus asked questions of those in His world, but one of the reasons was certainly to help them develop wisdom so they could apply truth to their lives.

You can apply the Wisdom Test, therefore, by asking a set of questions when you're faced with a decision. These questions help you apply wisdom to the situation, so if you answer yes to all of them, it's clear that your decision is based on wisdom and you probably ought to proceed. If you answer no to all or most of them, you have more rigorous work to do to figure out the best course of action. The goal is to put in the least amount of effort to arrive at an effective decision. The Wisdom Test will help you conserve energy on decisions that you already possess the wisdom to make.

If the Obvious Test does not make your decision clear, ask the following questions:

- Does this decision line up with my convictions?
- Will the people I respect most agree with this decision? Have I asked them?
- Is this decision based on healthy boundaries that will produce self-respect?
- Will this decision cause personal growth in my life?
- Would I encourage my best friends to make this same decision?

Decision-making Skill 3: The Priority Test

Some decisions in life require more effort to figure out. You've gone through the Obvious Test and the Wisdom Test, but you still need more evidence that you are making the best decision. This happens when:

- The Bible doesn't specifically address the decision that is before you.
- You have many options to choose from.
- Your two best options are both attractive to you.
- The decision will impact your life for a long time to come.
- People you respect have differing opinions on how you should decide.

When this occurs, there are some simple and practical steps you can take.

Step 1: Write out your decision in a positive way. In other words, describe what you will do if you say yes to this decision. For instance, "I am considering moving my family to Colorado to begin working for a company there that would result in a pay increase." Because a description such as this encourages you to think about momentum in your life, it is better than saying, "I am considering turning down the job offer in Colorado." Whichever way you go with a decision like this, define the direction you will take if you say yes to the decision. Take full ownership of your choice and put your heart into it. You want to leave no room for negative thinking.

Step 2: Make a pro/con list. Create two columns on a sheet of paper. On one side write down the reasons why you *ought* to take this course of action. On the other side write down the reasons why this course of action is *not* a good idea.

Step 3: Prioritize the reasons. In both columns prioritize the reasons you have listed. The Bible clearly teaches that priorities lead to progress. Psalm 90:12 challenges us, “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” As you prioritize your thinking, wise decisions make themselves known.

I prefer to use an ABC system to prioritize my lists. This means I assign an A to the vital reasons I identify in my list. The supportive reasons get a B. I reserve a C for the reasons I came up with because I’m creative and can come up with ideas that don’t really affect the decision. Some people like to rank the reasons by importance (1, 2, 3...), so choose the scheme you are most comfortable with. For the rest of our discussion, I will assume you are using an ABC system.

Step 4: Compare the high-priority reasons from both lists. Evaluate the A reasons for saying yes with the A reasons for choosing no. If it is a tie, then move to the B reasons to see if the decision becomes clear. Don’t be fooled by quantity. It is quite possible that one list will have more reasons than the other, but this is inconsequential. Quantity is no substitute for quality, and decisions such as this require high-quality conclusions. Many people will automatically choose the list that has the largest number of reasons, which creates an accidental environment for success. The list with the most reasons might be the best choice, but it might not. The way to build clarity is to deliberately prioritize the evidence and discipline yourself to focus on the A reasons.

My decision to become a senior pastor in San Diego County was one of the most interesting chapters in my life. I was 29 and idealistic. I wanted nothing more than to fulfill God’s will for my life. I was willing to go anywhere and serve in any capacity to follow God’s lead. I had a productive interview with one of the members of the church and decided to accept an invitation to preach at one of their services. I went with great anticipation. The service went well, so the decision-making process began. It was the first time I discovered the power of priorities in figuring out a strategic course of action.

I made a list of all the reasons I should say no to this opportunity. The list included:

- The building was poorly designed. It had been added onto twice, and a beam ran three-fourths the length of the building, bisecting the auditorium with two-thirds of the space on one side of the beam and one-third of the space on the other side. For someone who started out in college as an architecture major, this could be a constant source of irritation.
- The ceiling of the auditorium was so low that I could hit the ceiling from the platform. If I were going to preach in this facility, I would have to behave because I could easily hurt my hand if I got too enthusiastic.
- The door from the auditorium to the office was in the middle of the stage. Part of the stage actually had to be removed every Sunday night to open this door.
- The church didn't seem to be relevant to San Diego County. It had the feel of a country church in Kansas rather than a Southern California church. This included everything from the music to the style of dress to the way the landscape was designed and maintained.
- The leadership of the church was immature. One man was influential but not savvy. He was brash, unsophisticated, and opinionated. People loved him and feared him, and it was clear that everything would need his approval.
- We would be taking a pay cut to work there. I was a youth pastor at a large church with a healthy salary and benefit package. This church was smaller than the other church's youth group, and they would not be able to match the salary I had enjoyed.
- It would be harder to own a home in this community because houses cost more and I would be making less.
- The congregation was relatively uneducated. Less than half

the people had college degrees, and I had recently earned my master's degree.

- The church was 25 years old and had never grown larger than 200 attendees. I think a church of 200 is a success, but the potential of a church in this area was much larger. I wasn't sure of the specific factors, but something was holding this church back.

There were only a few reasons for even considering this opportunity:

- San Diego County is a nice place to live.
- The church had a lot of potential.
- I had a strong sense that God was calling me and my family to this church.

I had a lot more reasons for saying no to this church than saying yes. I even liked the reasons for declining the invitation better than the reasons for accepting it. Had I based this decision on the number of reasons, I would never have moved to San Diego. Before I made this decision, I prioritized each of the reasons, assigning each one an A, B, or C.

I reached the conclusion that every reason on the “don't take this opportunity” list was a B priority. Two of the reasons on the “take this opportunity” list were also Bs, but the notion that God was calling us proved to be an A priority that overshadowed everything else.

Like other life decisions, I went into this opportunity with many questions. Could I overcome the obstacles this church presented? Could I help this church reach its potential? Did this group of people even want to reach their potential? Could my family handle this challenge? Would this church ever prosper enough to pay a salary that would allow us to purchase a house?

Of course, these questions did not get answered ahead of time. I had to calculate the risk and step out in faith and wait to see how it all worked out. Looking back, following the priorities was a smart move.

The church struggled along for years but eventually grew to be the largest in our community. The real accomplishment, however, was the

number of ministries that were launched from that one church. Pam and I started our writing and conference ministry while we served there. A drama ministry was birthed from a talented pool of performers. A nationally recognized cameraman and a TV producer discovered their talents and the courage to pursue their dreams in this congregation. Several people joined writers' groups and have published books, magazine articles, and curricula. Many went to the mission field. That church became a vibrant hub of creativity, accountability, and courageous pursuits.

It's Your Turn

What decision do you currently face that needs the Priority Test? Describe the decision in positive terms in the space below. Then on a separate sheet of paper work through the Priority Test.

When Life Is Truly Different

The vast majority of decisions in your life can be figured out using the Obvious Test, the Wisdom Test, and the Priority Test. Every once in a while, though, you will encounter decisions that are elusive. This happens when choices present themselves that are truly *different* from decisions you have encountered in the past. You are not sure how to get started because you are into new territory with new implications. You have little life experience to draw on, no track record to look back on. In order to tackle these decisions, you need to open yourself up to new possibilities.

Decision-making Skill 4: The Brainstorm Test

This test can be strenuous so you don't want to rely on it often, but there are times when it is necessary to answer the question, "Have I considered every possible solution I can imagine?" One of our great privileges in life is to exercise our creativity. The creativity to identify and explore brand new possibilities resides in all of us because we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and we are made in the image of a creative God (Genesis 1:26-27).

To release this creativity we need to open up our thinking. Most of us have developed either discipline or hesitancy in our thinking. We *discipline* our thinking so we keep focus on the important responsibilities of life. We *hesitate* in our thinking because of past mistakes or fear of letting unhealthy desires take over. We need to get beyond these barriers when truly new solutions are necessary. The steps to unleash this creativity include:

Step 1: Brainstorm a solution list. Write down every possible solution you can imagine. Include ideas that seem ridiculous, absurd, and impossible. It is vital during this process that you do not analyze any of these ideas. The brainstorming process is designed to break through the barriers that have developed during your journey in life. If you analyze or evaluate ideas during the brainstorming process, you will eliminate ideas that could lead to new solutions. The goal here is to get as many ideas on paper as you possibly can in the hope that a new possibility surfaces. If you have difficulty making a large enough list, ask trusted friends to add their ideas.

Do not rush this step. You may want to take breaks and come back to your list a number of times in order to consider the greatest number of ideas. Once the brainstorm list is completed, set it aside for a time. This break can last from a few minutes to a few days. The goal of this break is to shift from a brainstorming mentality to an evaluation mentality.

Step 2: Eliminate the ridiculous ideas. Cross out any ideas that are truly ridiculous. Be careful you don't eliminate ideas that *feel* ridiculous to you but are actually good possibilities. Again, you may want to ask friends to help you figure this out. You allowed these ridiculous ideas to

appear on your list to expand your creativity. Now it's time to eliminate them so they don't create clutter as you move forward.

Step 3: Eliminate ideas you are clearly not ready to consider. Some ideas on your list may sound possible, but you know in your heart you would never implement them. These ideas may not match your personality or your maturity level. Be careful that you do not eliminate these simply based on your emotional reaction to them. Real change is hard and makes you uncomfortable, so you want to keep challenging ideas on your list. You want to give yourself the freedom, however, to get rid of ideas that you are confident would make you miserable. For instance, I do not have the personality of a salesman. There are many sales positions I can imagine putting on my brainstorming list if I were considering a career change, but at this point I would eliminate most of these because selling something I'm not passionate about would wear me out.

The ideas you want to eliminate in this step are those that you know in your heart you would never focus on well enough to succeed. You do not want to commit yourself to a course of failure. It is wise to have someone you trust help you work through this step so you don't get rid of ideas you may be afraid of but that you would likely succeed at if you pursued them. Since your trusted friends are not afraid of the same things you are, they often have sharper insight into new possibilities for you.

Step 4: Walk the best ideas from your brainstorm list through the Priority Test. Once you have refined your brainstorm list, you will be left with one or more new courses of action. You now need to evaluate these ideas. Since you would do this much work only for a life-changing decision, you want to give this process the focus and time it deserves. If you have more than one idea to pursue, work the process until you have two options remaining. Then create an idea 1/idea 2 list. List the pros and cons for each, prioritize the reasons, and focus your evaluation on the high-priority reasons.

You are a decision-maker and you can figure out the journey ahead.

Just for Fun

A clergyman, a doctor, and a business consultant were playing golf together and waiting for a slow group ahead.

“What’s with these people?” the business consultant exclaimed. “We’ve been waiting over half an hour. It’s a complete disgrace.”

“They’re hopeless,” the doctor agreed. “I’ve never seen such a rabble on a golf course.”

The clergyman spotted the approaching greenkeeper. “What’s happening with that group ahead of us?” he asked. “They’re surely too slow and useless to be playing, aren’t they?”

The greenkeeper replied, “Oh, yes, that’s a group of blind firefighters. They lost their sight saving our clubhouse from a fire last year, so we always let them play for free anytime.”

The three golfers fell silent for a moment. Then the clergyman said, “Oh dear, that’s so sad. I shall say some special prayers for them tonight.”

The doctor added, rather meekly, “That’s a good thought. I’ll get in touch with an ophthalmic surgeon friend of mine to see if there’s anything that can be done for them.”

After pondering the situation for a few seconds, the business consultant turned to the greenkeeper and asked, “Why can’t they play at night?”⁶