

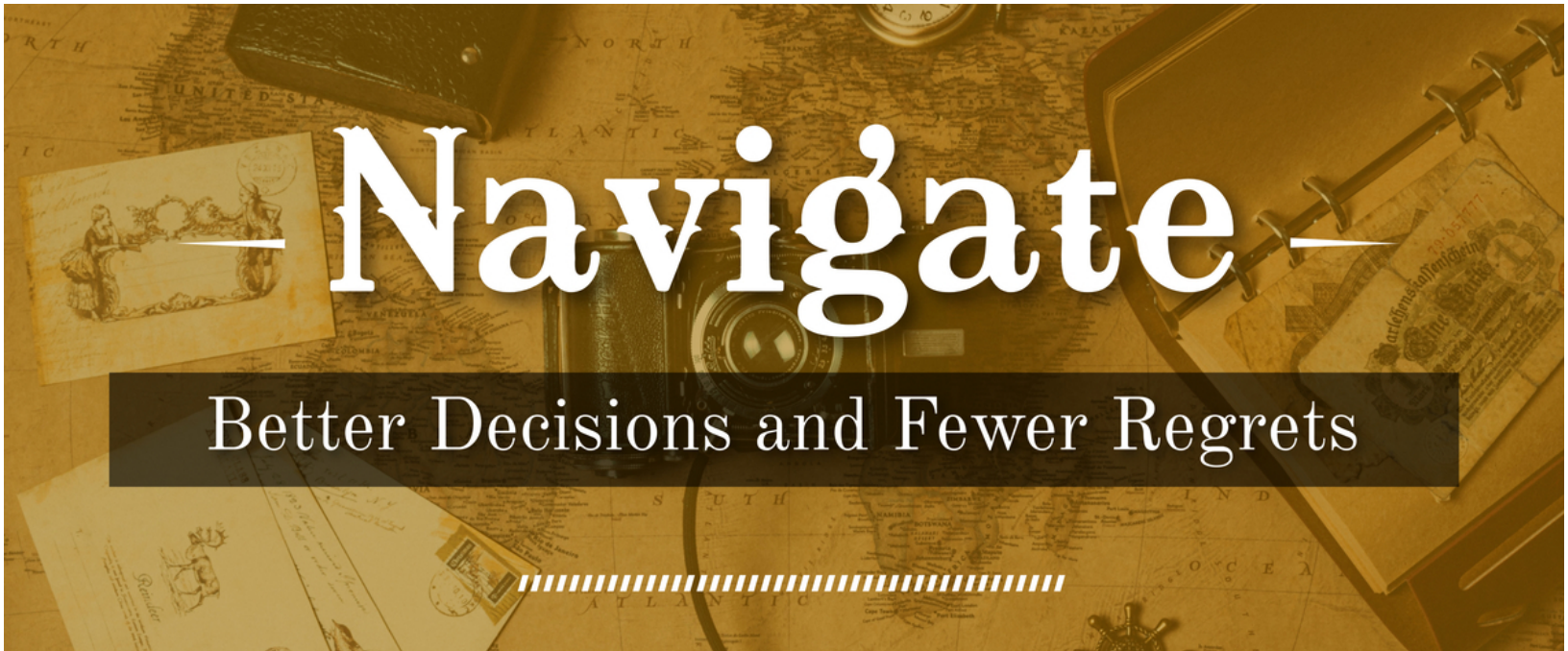
WELLSPRING

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Sermon Series Devotional

4/11/2021 - 05/2/2021

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One of the best things we can ask ourselves after something goes wrong is, “Looking back, what would I do differently?” Usually, we find that better decisions would have made a big difference, spared us a lot of regret, and helped us navigate life better. But why do we fail in making good decisions? Lots of reasons: impulsive behavior, operating strictly from emotions, trying to prove something to someone or ourselves, not thinking of consequences, or sometimes just immaturity. Over the next few weeks, we will allow scripture to guide us into making better decisions so we can have fewer regrets in our lifetime. You can use this devotional in any way that fits with your schedule. It follows the accompanying sermon series.

Suggested Use

Our devotional is designed to be a resource for you and can be used in a variety of ways. Each week, you will be provided a series of questions, reflections, and prompts to engage with. You can complete them all in one setting or divide them up throughout the week. Whether you are using it in a group or for your own personal time, we suggest keeping a journal that can be used to respond to the questions each week and for prayers.

Week One - What story do I want to tell...really?

Sometimes we forget that we are the author of our own story. How we react, what we initiate, what we choose to believe are all a part of our continuing story. And, sometimes the story is something we have settled on because we don't want to be honest with ourselves. The decisions we make are creating our legacy while we live. Someday, people will reflect on our lives and the decisions we make will determine the story they will tell about us.

Read Luke 24:13-35

- If the two on the road to Emmaus had decided to NOT trust their original understanding of who Jesus was, would they still be remembered today in scripture? Would Jesus's crucifixion be thought of any differently?

Read James 1:12-15

- When we give in to temptation, we choose how we tell the story. Usually it is someone else's fault. What does James say about it? How do you tend to frame your mistakes?

Read Joshua 24:14-15

- Joshua gathered the people and rehearsed their history with God. He knew they were at a crossroads. What choices were they given? What were the likely consequences of those choices? What did Joshua say his choice would be and how would that dictate the story of his life?

Read Numbers 13:17--14:4

- Spies had been sent into the promised land to bring back a report: ten gave a chilling report and two believed they could take the land through faithful action. What decision did they make and why? How did this decision affect the story of these people?

Genesis 37:12-35

- Joseph's jealous brothers sold him into slavery and concocted a lie to explain what happened to him. What story evolved from this single choice? How did it change the course of this family's life? How did God redeem this decision?
- What are some major or minor decisions you have made that changed the course of your life? Were they well considered or were they reflexive?

Week Two - Is there a tension that deserves attention?

Have you ever had the phrase “uh-oh” hit you in the middle of something? It’s that little alarm that says you may be going the wrong direction or ready to do something you shouldn’t. It’s easy to dismiss, but sometimes we do it at our own peril.

Read Daniel 1:1-16

- What characteristics did Daniel possess to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans? Did he have reason to be self-assured or confident?
- Daniel, along with Hananiah (called Shadrach), Mishael (called Meshach), and Azariah (called Abednego) were offered royal food. What was Daniel’s response? How did that response affect the palace master?
- Daniel and his three friends proposed a test. What were the results? What last result did that choice have (see vs 18-21).
- Have you ever been caught in a situation when someone asked you to give up your principles? How did you handle it?

Read I Samuel 24:1-22

- King Saul was jealous of David’s popularity and pursued him to kill him. At one point, David hid in a cave and Saul entered, not knowing David was there. What did David’s men think God was offering to David? What did David choose to do?
- What was David’s response to his choice? Do you have any insight as to why he felt that way?
- The part of the robe David cut off would have been highly symbolic and even faith-related. Does this change your insight as to why David felt remorse? What were David’s assumptions about what was right related to doing harm to Saul?
- How do you listen to your conscience when you are given a choice that violates what your conscience tells you, even if the world tells you it is ok?

Week Three - What is the wise thing to do?

A case can be made that all our decisions are eventually emotional. But what informs our emotions? What if we could step out of our impulse mode and view our situation more objectively? Would it make a difference? How does looking for the wise choice change our decision?

Read James 3:13-18

- James extols wisdom and also lists things that are contrary to wisdom. What are these contrary motives or feelings?
- Verse 17 lists the traits of wisdom. What are they? How do these help you define what a wise choice is?
- Galatians 5:22-23 list fruits of the spirit. Do you think these are the good fruits James is referring to? How do these fruits of the spirit help define a wise choice?

Read Mathew 7:24-29

- Describe the two options for the foundation of the houses described here. Take a minute to list the qualities of each--what makes one good and one risky and unstable? Why would Jesus use this illustration?
- What role do initial plans and strategy have in a successful outcome or stable result?
- How comfortable are you with planning or strategizing when making big decisions? Do you do pre-work or do you react in the moment?

Read Luke 14:28-32

- What is the wisdom shown in this illustration? How does it relate to the one above?
- As obvious as it seems, why is this so hard to do?

Week Four - What does love require of me?

So many of the decisions we make are surrounded by self-interest. What will benefit ME? What will keep ME from getting into trouble or making a mistake? What will make ME feel better? But what if there is a higher calling that involves the larger world and other people? Is there a claim on our lives and our decisions that is more than about ME?

Read Matthew 22:36-40

- What is the greatest commandment according to Jesus? In your own words, what does it mean?
- What is the second greatest commandment? What does love others as you love yourself mean? Can you love others if you don't love yourself?
- What gets in the way of you loving yourself? What are things you can do to increase your love of yourself?

Read I Corinthians 13

- Who do you love? How easy is it for you to love these people? What can make it hard?
- In the first twelve chapters of this book, Paul focused on a multitude of problems and brokenness in the church. In chapter 13, Paul summarized what he believed was the antidote to their problems: Love. Does Paul describe love as a feeling?
- Make a list of how love behaves.
- Who benefits from these actions: others, ourselves or both?
- Which of these are the hardest for you to do? What makes it hard?
- When is it more important to be loving than to be right? How hard is that for you to do?
- How does being committed to love require us to not be self-absorbed?

This devotional study was informed by Better Decisions, Fewer Regrets by Andy Stanley, Zondervan Publishing, ©2020.