

We Live by Choice, Not by Chance
And we're free to alter the course of our lives any time we
want.

By Hal Urban, from *Life's Greatest Lessons*.

One way of looking at life is to see it as a daily series of choices. In fact, that's the healthiest and most venturesome way I can think of for starting each day. From the time we wake up in the morning until we go to bed at night, we're making choices. If we're not, then someone or something else is making them for us.

It always amazes me how strongly people will argue when told they do everything by choice. They're so stuck on the "have-to" philosophy of life, it's hard for them to let go. I was teaching this concept recently to some high-school seniors in an elective psychology class. The example I used was "You chose to come to class this morning." I would have bet a month's salary that I could predict the first response. And, sure enough, it came. One of my favorite kids in the class said, "No way, man. I had to come to class." "No, you didn't," I said. "You chose to come." He then proceeded to reel off all the horrible things that would happen to him if he didn't attend class: the school would call his parents, he'd get yelled at home, he might get grounded, he'd get caught by the vice-principal, his grade would go down, etc.

When he was through, I said, "Right! You made a choice. You chose to come to class instead of choosing the consequences of not coming. But you were still free to make that choice. Some of your classmates aren't here. For a variety of reasons, they chose not to come this morning. Maybe someone chose to get some extra sleep or take the whole day off. Maybe someone else chose to go to the donut shop. But you chose to be here."

At any given moment, we're free to choose what to think and what to do. God gave us a free will. No one can take it away from us. We can alter the course of our lives any time we want, because whatever we do, we do by choice. We can say we have to do things or that we're forced to, but the truth is that we do what we choose to do. It's a simple yet great discovery. Because once we realize that we do things by choice, we begin to accept greater responsibility for our own lives and to take more effective control over them. We're the results of our choices.

The Most Important Choices We Get to Make

It wasn't our choice to be born into the world. And it's not our choice that someday we're going to die. However, the period in between, the one we call life, presents us with countless choices. There are some obvious ones due to the nature of our society. We can choose our friends, careers, lifestyles, political affiliations, faith, where to live, what kind of car to drive, and what kind of music to listen to. But there are some other choices which, while less obvious, are far more important. We're either unaware of them or just don't give them much thought. Yet, they're the choices that determine the quality of our lives. Based on what life has taught me, these are what I consider to be our most important choices:

- **We're free to choose our character**—the type of persons we become. We can allow ourselves to be molded by others and our environment, or we can commit ourselves to self-development. We can become less than we're capable of, or we can become all that we're capable of.
- **We're free to choose our values.** We can let the media tell us what's important, or we can decide for ourselves. We can base our standards on what others are doing, or we can base them on what we know is right and good.
- **We're free to choose how to treat other people.** We can put them down, or we can lift them up. We can be self-centered and inconsiderate, or we can be respectful, kind, and helpful.
- **We're free to choose how to handle adversity.** We can allow ourselves to be crushed, to give up, and to feel sorry for ourselves. Or we can choose to look for a source of strength within us, to persevere, and to make the most out of what life deals us.
- **We're free to choose how much we'll learn.** We can look upon learning as an unpleasant duty or as a great opportunity for bettering ourselves. We can be close-minded or open-minded; we can be stagnant, or we can grow.
- **We're free to choose what we'll accomplish in life.** We can allow our circumstances or other people to determine what we make of ourselves, or we can choose our own direction and goals. We can be undisciplined and lazy, or we can be self-disciplined and hardworking.

- **We're free to choose our own belief system.** We can ignore our spiritual nature, or we can accept it as an important dimension of life. We can worship pleasure and the world's material things, or we can look for something that's ultimately more important.
- **We're free to choose our own purpose.** We can wander aimlessly, or we can search for a meaning in life, and then live according to it. We can live to please only ourselves, or we can find a cause that's greater, one that helps us understand and appreciate life more fully.
- **We're free to choose our attitude regardless of circumstances.** This is the most important choice we'll ever make because it affects everything we do in life.

We're Always Choosing

Much of our potential goes to waste simply because it's never used, just like the battery that corrodes or the muscle that atrophies after lying dormant for too long. Most of the time, we fail to exercise our choices because we're not aware of having them. Yet, those choices are available to us every day of our lives. We can make changes.