

Decisions

1. Direction

Easter April 15-16, 2017

How many of you have seen the movie [Monsters, Inc.](#)? Lots of you! OK, then you know that in the movie there are two worlds: the world of monsters and the world of humans. The monsters' job is to sneak into the human world and scare kids when they are in their bedrooms at night. Then the monsters slip back to their own world. (Actually, most of the monsters are kind of furry and funny, but the kids don't know that, so they get scared when they see them.)

The monsters get into the kids' rooms through special doors. They have a warehouse filled with these doors back at Monsters, Inc. headquarters. They can select a door and use it to walk from their world into the human world to scare children. The main plot of this movie is about what happens when one little girl (named "Boo") accidentally ends up in the monsters world. Two good-hearted monsters named Mike and Sully try to find the door back to her room so they can return her back to her life. It's a fun movie, especially with little kids who are afraid of the dark!

I have a door up here on the platform today. When we come to a door, we have to make the decision: will I open this or not? It doesn't lead to a monster world (at least I don't think so!). It's here to help me make a point. This door represents the decisions we face. Every door we come across represents a decision: do I open it and go to a new place, or do I leave it closed and stay here? Decisions are like doors that open the way to different realities.

When I was a senior in high school, I faced the "college decision" door. Where should I go? After talking with our guidance counselor, I decided on a college to attend. I applied, was accepted and sent in the deposit. Then, a couple of months later, I changed my mind. I decided to go to a different college instead. My parents sent in another deposit (though with less enthusiasm this time).

So I went to that second college. While I was there, not only did I get a degree, I also met Linda, who is now my wife. I got connected to a great Christian Fellowship there where I grew spiritually and sensed the call to be a pastor.

How would my life be different today if I had made a different decision? What if I had gone to the college I applied to originally? For one thing, I wouldn't be married to Linda. That would be bad news for my 3 boys! Would I have still become a pastor? I don't know. That decision was a doorway into the life I have today.

Your decisions have made your life what it is today. The doors you have chosen to walk through have led you to where you are today. That's because in many ways **our decisions determine our destiny**. Our decisions today, both big and small, determine the direction of our lives tomorrow.

When we are kids, most of our decisions are made for us. Our parents decide what we are going to eat, what we will wear, when we will go to bed. Our teachers decide what we will study, what time we will eat lunch and whether we move to the next grade. But the older we get, the more we make our own decisions.

Researcher Sheena Iyengar found that the average person makes about 70 decisions every day. That's 25,500 decisions a year. Over 70 years, that's 1,788,500 decisions. One philosopher said, "Life is a sum of all your choices." You put all of those 1,788,500 choices together, and that's who you are.¹

There are certainly some things in our lives that we don't choose. We don't choose who our parents will be or how tall we are. Yes, some things just happen to us. If you are sitting at a red light and a car rams you from behind, you don't choose that accident. Even so, we do get to make a lot of decisions in our lives. God gives us *free will* to choose, and those decisions will have a huge impact on who we become and what our lives are like.

Today we are starting a new 4-part message series about what the Bible says about how to make wise decisions: the kind of decisions that will result in a rich life that honors God and reduces regret. We're starting this series on Easter because this, of all days, tells us we can make a new beginning!

In **Luke 24**, there is a fascinating story about two unnamed guys who faced several doors of decision. First, these guys decided to be followers of Jesus. That decision led them to follow Jesus to Jerusalem where they saw him get nailed to the cross and die. After Jesus died, their hopes for the future were in ashes. They heard some of the other disciples say they saw Jesus' tomb and it was empty, but they were still feeling disillusioned and discouraged, so they made another decision: to go back to their hometown.

Luke 24 says they were walking along the road to the village called Emmaus when a guy they didn't recognize fell in step with them and started talking with them. That guy turned out to be the risen Christ.

Verse 25 tells us that at one point, *He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"²⁷ And beginning with*

¹ John Ortberg, *All the Places to Go* (Tyndale House, 2015), page 8; from *Preaching Today* submitted by Kevin Miller, Wheaton, Illinois

Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

So the resurrected Jesus wasn't going into the house until the guys invited him in to eat with them. What if they hadn't decided to invite the stranger in? They would have missed a life-changing moment. But they opened the door to Jesus, and that meal changed their lives. It was then that they recognized who He was. They were eating with the risen Jesus! That led to their next door of decision.

After Jesus left them, they had to decide “Now what do we do? Keep going back home or somewhere else?” *³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*

That decision to rejoin the other believers changed their lives. We never would have read about them if they hadn't made that decision. If they kept going on the road to Emmaus, it would have been a different story. But they decided to return to Jerusalem and they became part of the story of the early church.

When you face decision moments, ask yourself, “If I go down this road, what story will I end up telling? Is that what I want my story to be?”

We all face many doors. First, there is the **Life choices door**.

Life is filled with choices every day. Even the choice of what we have for breakfast isn't simple. Suppose you decide, “I'll have Cheerios.” Then you must decide, “Great! What kind?” These are some of the varieties of Cheerios cereal you have to choose from: Original, Multi Grain, Multi Grain Peanut Butter, Honey Nut, Honey Nut Medley Crunch, Honey-Nut Gluten Free, Apple Cinnamon, Pumpkin Spice, Fruity, Very Berry, Chocolate, Chocolate Gluten Free, Multi Grain Dark Chocolate Crunch, Frosted, Dulce de Leche, and Cinnamon Burst. I'll stop there. That's a lot of choices, and that's just for breakfast!

The rest of the day we're going to face a lot of decisions that are much bigger than Cheerios. We're going to come to the doors labeled: *Job* (here there are a lot of options to choose from; which door will I step through?) I remember my kids in middle school being asked what career they wanted. They didn't know what to say. That's really early! I told them you could answer: "reigning monarch." Other doors include: *School* (should I go? Where?), *Spouse* (who should I marry? We don't want to get that one wrong.) and *Where should I live?* Which door will I choose? Go to a high school reunion and see the results of the choices people have made.

And, how should you decide? With your gut? **Proverbs 3:5-6** tells us, *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*^[a] This scripture didn't say, "Trust in Lord and He will make all choices easy." And it didn't say, "He will make all choices work out the way you want." What it does say is that He will make your way "STRAIGHT." Your life will have integrity and it will go the direction you are meant to go. Understand that your main life goal is not in jeopardy. God's purpose is less "What" you are to do, but more of a "Who" you are called to be.

Second, is **the wrong door**. There are some doors marked "Do Not Enter," and we should leave them alone. These include the door to sin and bad choices. **Genesis 4:7** *...if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*"

We all face the temptation to do what God says not to do. It is the temptation to sin. God warns us not to open the door to action which will hurt us and others. He started with the 10 commandments: "Don't open to the door that leads to an affair. Don't open ourselves to anger so that we blow up in irritation and hurt people. Don't open the door to lies." He says, "Leave that door shut. It will just cause trouble."

Each of us have taken the wrong door at one time or another. But, here's the good news: when we realize we have gone through a door God said not to, we can turn around and go back the other way. That is called "repentance." We can tell God, "I'm sorry I did that, please help me not to." He will forgive us and give us power to avoid it next time.

Third, is **the reaction door**. As I said earlier, we don't choose everything that happens in our lives. Some things just happen to us such as a company closing or an illness. We don't get to choose some things that happen. However, we do get to choose how we REACT and RESPOND to those things!

You wouldn't choose for people to sin against you, but you can choose whether or not you forgive or become bitter. Those two guys on the road to Emmaus didn't choose for Jesus to die. But when they met the risen Jesus, that

changed the way they responded to life. Knowing Jesus gave them a new power to choose life. So can we!

Actor Michael J Fox came down with Parkinson's disease at a young age. He says, "I have no choice about whether or not I have Parkinson's. I have nothing but choices about how I react to it. In those choices, there's freedom to do a lot of things in areas that I wouldn't have otherwise found myself in."

Carol Kent writes:

When despair tries to take me under...I choose life.

When I wonder what God could possibly be thinking...I choose trust.

When I desperately want relief from unrelenting reality...I choose perseverance.

When I feel oppressed by my disappointment and sorrow...I choose gratitude.

When I want to keep my feelings to myself...I choose vulnerability.

When nothing goes according to my plan...I choose relinquishment.

When I want to point the finger...I choose forgiveness.

When I want to give up...I choose purposeful action.²

We can choose how we react to life. The decision is ours.

Finally, there is **the Abundant Life door**. In *Monsters Inc.*, Sully was grieved because the door to little Boo's room had been shredded. That meant he was cut off from her and he'd never be able to see the little girl who called him "kitty." Then his buddy, Mike, found a way to gather all the pieces of wood and put the door together again so that Sully could find his way back to Boo.

Jesus said that this physical world is not all there is. There is also an unseen spiritual reality around us right now. There is a God who created you and who loves you. We are not always aware of Him because we have been cut-off from God by sin. We lose sight of the spiritual world and, then, we think this world is all there is. We resort to living in our own material world and we forget about God.

John 3:16 says, however, that God loved us too much to let us stay separated from him. He came seeking us. Nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus, who was God in the flesh, stepped through a door from the eternal world into our world. And one Friday in Jerusalem, Jesus allowed himself to be nailed to a cross and killed. They laid him in a tomb and rolled a stone door over the entrance. At that moment, humanity was totally cut off from God. Heaven and earth could not connect. Death was in charge.

² Carol Kent, *A New Kind of Normal* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), *Table of Contents*

Then, on Sunday everything changed! Jesus rose from the dead! He walked out the door of that tomb into the world of the people He loved. That includes you and me! When Jesus walked out of that tomb, He opened the door to a whole new world for us: life with God, life that is eternal, life that has purpose here and never ends.

Today there is nothing that needs to stand between you and God.

...not your sin (He paid for that on the cross),

...not your pain or grief (He understands and has been through it), and

...not your religious performance or history (He's bigger than that).

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Jesus walked through the door of that tomb and now invites us to walk into a new life with Him. It is a life no longer filled with brokenness: you will find wholeness. It is a life with purpose: you will learn why you are here. It is a life of freedom: you don't have to be held by the same habits as before. You can be free from guilt. You will never take another step without God's presence. And, best of all, it is a life that lasts forever! You will leave this world and go through the door called heaven, where there is unimaginable joy and fulfillment forever.

In the last book of the Bible, the risen Jesus said, **Rev. 3:20** *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.* What an image! Jesus says He is standing at the door of our lives, knocking! He's waiting for us to open to him. He is God! He could vaporize the door if He wanted to. He could walk through the door if He wanted to. But he won't. Jesus won't force His way into our lives. We need to decide to invite Him in.

Jesus will knock. The decision is up to us. Will we open the door of our lives to Him or not? You can make the choice to do that today. You can do just what those two guys on the road to Emmaus did: invite Jesus in. Then He will come in and eat with you!

In just a minute I am going to pray and you can pray with me to open yourself to a new life with Jesus. You will step into a whole new story.

Maybe you have done that. Some time ago you invited Jesus in to your life. You were following Him. But somewhere along the road, you lost track. Maybe you need to make the decision to rejoin other believers, just like those two guys on the road did. When they met the risen Jesus, they immediately went back to find the other believers. They shared their stories with each other. You are at a different door: not the door of first decision, but the door of connection. Remember, **Revelation 3:20** was actually written to a church, to people who

already said “yes” once to Him, to people who had already started a relationship with Him.

And if you are already following Christ and already connected to other believers, perhaps you are facing another door. Maybe there are some areas where you know Jesus is calling you in a certain direction, but you have been hesitating to open the door and follow Him.

Or, maybe you have been walking through doors that He has labeled “Do Not Enter”? You know He is saying, “Follow me in a different direction.” Today you can decide to follow Jesus through the door to a new habit.

Maybe you are facing a life decision and you know what Jesus is saying, but you haven’t taken the step. Today can be the day you resolve to follow Him through the door to a new place.

Every one of us will hear Jesus knocking at our door at some point in our lives. I believe God is knocking in the lives of many of us here today. Now the decision is up to you. Will you let Him in?