

Better Decisions, Fewer Regrets

Session 3

The Legacy Question – What story do you want to tell?

Overview

5 questions will be at the heart of this study.

1. The Integrity Question – Am I being honest with myself?
2. The Legacy Question – What story do I want to tell?
3. The Conscience Question – Is there a tension that deserves my attention?
4. The Maturity Question – What is the wise thing to do?
5. The Relationship Question – What does love require of me?

Session 3 Overview

Every decision you make becomes a permanent part of your story. The story of your life. Every decision has an outcome, a consequence, a result. It may be good or bad, desirable or undesirable, expected or unexpected.

So, when you're making a decision of any magnitude, you owe it to yourself to pause, look ahead, and ask yourself: "What story do I want to tell?"

I'm guessing you'd like to be able to tell your entire story without skipping any chapters or having to lie about the details, right? To be able to sit down with your kids or grandkids someday and tell 'em your story. Your ENTIRE story. And as they get older, you'd like to be able to add layers and details rather than hoping they don't ask.

If you're single, you want to someday sit across the table from someone you hope to spend the rest of your life with and tell your story. All of it. You'd like to be the hero in your own story. We all want that. And going forward, you can have that. But it will require you to stop mid-decision and ask: "What story do I want to tell? When this crisis, this opportunity, this temptation is in the rearview mirror...when it's reduced to a story I tell...what story do I want to tell? Which of the available option do you want as part of your legacy?"

Key Summary in Session 3

In this third session, we will discuss the Legacy Question: What story do you want to tell?

The good news is, to a large extent, you get to decide. But you decide one decision at a time because you write the story of your life one decision at a time. Every decision you make becomes an outcome that then becomes a permanent part of your story.

So what kind of story do you want to tell?

That question draws us out of the immediate and focuses us on the eventual. It brings clarity...and that's a really good thing, because the pressure and emotions of the moment can be like a fog that causes us to lose sight of our story.

Perhaps that's why our worst decisions are almost always fueled by something with strong emotional appeal. That weekend, that first marriage, that purchase, that lease. It was so appealing that we felt we had to buy it, do it, or sign it. But that was actually a feeling, not reality. We always have a choice.

Experts tell us that once our appetites are engaged in the decision making process, we fall victim to a cognitive bias labeled *focalism*. That's why the first time you fell in love, all you could see was that person. Everything and everyone else faded into the background. When you want a car, it's suddenly everywhere you look. We hyper-focus on that one aspect, and the big picture – our story – slips into the background.

That's what makes this week's question so powerful. It empowers us to put the decision-making process within the broader context of the story of our lives.

It's a struggle every generation throughout history has wrestled with. In fact, there's a well-known story in the Hebrew Bible that serves as a perfect illustration of this principle. Around 1850 BC, a seventeen-year-old named Joseph – one of twelve sons – found himself in a tough spot. His father, Jacob, loved him

more than the other boys because Joseph was the son of Jacob's favorite wife. Eventually, the jealousy of the ten older brothers gets the best of them and they decide to kill Joseph.

After thirteen long, hard years, Joseph finds himself as prime minister of Egypt. His brothers have traveled to Egypt, desperate for grain. They bow before the prime ministers; unaware it is their brother. When Joseph reveals his identity, his brothers are terrified. They assume Joseph would do to them what they had done to him...or worse! But Joseph wasn't anything like his brothers. He decided many years earlier to create a different narrative. And he didn't want revenge to be part of that story.

So, what story do you want to tell? What story do you want told about you? Like Joseph and his brothers, we're writing our stories one decision at a time.

Questions

1. The choices you make now will be nothing more than a story you tell someday. How does that reality focus you on your legacy?
2. Do you agree that some of your worst decisions have been fueled by a strong emotional appeal? How might it help to press "pause" rather than "play" in these moments?
3. Focalism is when we hyper-focus on one thing and everything else (including our stories) falls into the background. How has this played out in your life?
4. What part of Joseph's story stands out most to you? Why?
5. What one decision can you make this week that might change the trajectory of your story?

Closing

Every decision you make becomes part of the story of your life. Every relational, financial, and professional decision and the outcomes of those decisions becomes permanent parts of your story.

We've all lived long enough to have a few chapters we wish we could erase. No doubt you have a few stories you wish you could rewrite. We all do. We call it regret. But chances are, the decisions that led to your greatest regrets could have been avoided if you had paused to ask yourself the legacy question: "What story do I want to tell?"

From here on out, pursue a story that you'll be proud to share and others will want to repeat. That happened in the life of Joseph – and it can happen in your life. His brothers, on the other hand, did not choose wisely and had to live with their lies.

If you're in the middle of making a decision right now, stop and ask yourself: Of the available options, which one do I want as a permanent part of the story of my life? Never decide anything that will make you a liar for life. That is the Legacy Question.