

MAKING RIGHT CHOICES IN COLLEGE
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First Chapel
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Text: Joshua 24:15 -- *Choose you this day whom you will serve...as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.*

Introduction

1. I have noticed in the Dining Commons five posters and a brochure titled, "A Matter of Choice."
 - a. The choice the food service personnel are referring to relate to nutrition--eating the right food!
 - b. As I studied their posters and brochure, I reminded myself that attending a Christian college is about making choices--choices that will guide you throughout life.
 - 1) A Christian college is a place for spiritual formation
 - 2) A Christian college is a place for social growth
 - 3) A Christian college is a place of the mind--a place for intellectual growth
 - c. A Christian college is about making choices
2. Joshua, a mighty leader in the Old Testament, talked to the Israelites about choices facing them.
 - a. In Joshua 28, he is giving a farewell address to the people of Israel.
 - b. He reviews with them God's faithfulness to them in the past.

- c. He reminds them of the enemies around them...
 - 1) who are not followers of their God;
 - 2) who seek to destroy them as a people of God;
 - 3) and who attempt to undermine their faith in God.
 - d. Joshua concludes his message to them with these words, *Choose you this day whom you will serve...(no one can serve two masters), but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*
3. From the first day you arrived on this campus, you have been faced with choices:
- a. friends who will strengthen you and your faith, or friends who will weaken you and your faith,
 - b. to get involved in campus life or withdraw and isolate yourself,
 - c. to be positive or negative about resident life,
 - d. to take your academic studies seriously or ignore them and take them lightly,
 - e. to accept the traditions/values/lifestyle guidelines of this institution, or to challenge the disciplines of the college,
 - f. to participate in chapel services as an expression of worship or to endure chapel as a requirement you hate,
 - g. to be a believer in Jesus or an unbeliever.
4. Joshua challenged the people of Israel to choose who they would serve, and he challenges each one of us today to make similar choices:
- a. to draw a line in the sand and say, "I can do no other;"
 - b. to stake our life on the truth of scripture;

- c. to risk our reputation, friends, and perceived influence for our radical commitment to the Lordship of Christ in our lives;
- d. to cast our lot with those who believe--really believe--in the leadership of God in their lives;
- e. to base our faith not on emotions, feelings, or even the evidence around us but on the promises of scripture which affirm with Joshua, God will not leave us or forsake us;
- f. We can choose...to believe that He will be present to provide for us wisdom as we are faced with choices that have lifelong and eternal consequences. OUR CHOICES DO HAVE CONSEQUENCES!

I ask you today to make (or renew) three decisions related to your involvement at MVNC.

I. CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY...TO BE A DISCIPLINED STUDENT

Dr. Al Truesdale, Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Christian Ethics at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, often laughs as he recalls his beginning days at Trevecca Nazarene College. He boldly told the registrar, when asked what program he wanted to enroll in, "I want to enroll in the 'preacher program!'" (He eventually graduated from Emory University with a Ph.D. in Philosophical Theology and is a brilliant scholar.)

- A. MVNC, like Trevecca Nazarene College, is a Christian liberal arts college. We are much more than a vocational training school--whether the vocation be preaching, social work, accounting, or teacher education.

1. The words “liberal arts” have their roots in the Latin word *liberalis*, which means “free man” or free person.
 2. *Liberalis* refers to the arts, skills, understandings, and abilities of a “free” person, someone who is not controlled by others, as was a slave, or someone who does not or cannot think for himself or herself.
 3. A Christian liberal arts college teaches the arts, skills, understandings, and abilities of a free person in Christian perspective.
 4. It is our goal to integrate the heart of Christian faith with the best in liberal arts education.
- B. The curriculum of a Christian college reflects our belief in a strong liberal arts foundation.
1. There is a core...a general education core needing approximately two years to complete.
 2. These required courses include courses on the Bible, in philosophy, science, mathematics, foreign languages, English, history, communication, literature, and the arts.
 3. We believe there is a benefit to all students who come here to receive a broad-based education.
 4. This is why we listen to classical music, view art from different perspectives, and study world civilization.
- C. What are the skills of a “free” person
1. The skills to think clearly and analytically,

2. The skills to use words precisely,
 3. The skills to solve problems creatively,
 4. The skills to communicate well--in writing and in speaking,
 5. The skills to read widely.
- D. These skills then prepare you for a career.
1. Society is in constant change.
 2. However, if you acquire a strong liberal arts education from a Christian perspective, if you acquire the skills of a “free” person with strong biblical and theological foundations, you will be prepared to make a significant difference for Christ in the 21st century.
 3. And you will be able to move from one career to another, because the basics have been covered.
 4. From this perspective, a liberal arts college is very career oriented.
- E. We seek to develop the mind...the way one thinks
to cultivate the heart...the way one responds to God, and to shape servant leaders who will make a difference for Christ in their world.
- F. Take your academic studies seriously. Discipline your schedule to give priority time to your studies. Don't wait until mid-terms before you realize that MVNC is not an extended summer camp.

CHOOSE TO BE A DISCIPLINED STUDENT

(My second challenge...)

II. CHOOSE THIS DAY...TO BE A DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIAN

- A. Personal testimony...TNC...revival services...in room late at night -- “If I’m going to be a Christian, I want to be the best Christian I can.”
1. God took my humble prayer, accepted it, and came into my life in a sanctifying, cleansing way.
 2. He empowered me to choose His way when faced with issues or choices before me. It’s been an incredible journey of faith and spiritual formation.
 3. We desire for you to become intentional about your spiritual formation...your spiritual journey.
- B. A distinctive Christian has three fundamental commitments:
1. A personal commitment to Christ--the development of a personal relationship with Christ.
 2. A personal commitment to the body of Christ--as evidenced through responsible involvement in the faith community.
 3. A personal commitment to the work of Christ--working in our community and around the world for Christ.
- C. Ephesians 4:32 was chosen this year by Chaplain Sivewright to be the college’s verse of the year.
1. This verse summarizes what it means to live the Christian life -- *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.*
 2. We are to relate to others in the same manner God, for Christ’s sake, relates to us.
 - a. on campus/off campus,

- b. in the classroom or in the resident facilities,
 - c. whether I am a student or a faculty member,
 - d. during the day or at night,
 - e. on weekdays or on weekends.
3. This summer I had a father of a student tell me, “My son is finding heroes in the faculty and the administration.” The dad continued to speak glowingly about the impact Professor Lincoln Stevens is having on his son. (No one accuses Prof. Stevens of teaching easy courses. But firmness is balanced with kindness and compassion.)
4. This summer I spoke at a luncheon for graduates of MVNC’s Adult Ministerial Studies Program. This program is designed to assist pastors in completing their ministerial course of study. Teachers in our Religion and Philosophy Division teach the courses in the program on Tuesday evenings. Usually, it takes a student four or five years to complete this program of studies.

There were three graduates this year. Each graduate was given an opportunity to share his testimony. One pastor spoke of his gratitude to the teachers in the program. Of the program he said, “This is the only thing I have completed. I had to take the GED in order to begin the program.” He continued, “When I started the program, I had a third grade reading level. The teachers were patient with me. They returned my papers with guidance on how to improve my papers.” He concluded, “Through Dr. Cubie’s classes, I have come to love theology. I want

to be just like Dr. Cubie.” What a compliment! What a Christian example of kindness and compassion in the context of rigorous expectations.

5. Recently I asked the faculty and staff, “Isn’t life too short for us not to live together kindly, compassionately, and forgivingly?”
6. And to students this plea: Daily find at least one person (perhaps “the least of these”-- to use the biblical reference) to whom you, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, can reach out to in kindness, compassion, or forgiveness.

CHOOSE...TO BE A DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIAN

MY LAST CHALLENGE...

III. CHOOSE...TODAY...TO BECOME A DECISIVE LEADER

A. What you will be, you are now becoming.

1. To a returning student, I said several days ago, "You are a leader. You must determine what kind of leader you will be."

For good or bad, right or wrong, positive or negative, critical or affirming, supportive or undermining, Christian or non-Christian.

2. I work on the principle that all of us are gifted leaders in the particular responsibility or assignment or situation in which God has placed us.

B. A decisive leader...is a servant leader (sounds contradictory at first, until you understand the biblical definition of leadership).

1. "A servant is someone who delights in helping other people succeed."
2. Christian leadership is, I believe, humble service to others in the community of faith whose head is Christ for the purpose of enabling them, through modeling and teaching, to fulfill their ministry to each other and their mission in the world.
3. My passion is that MVNC shape servant leaders who will make a difference for Christ in the 21st century.

C. A decisive leader...is a principle-centered leader...

1. who begins with scripture as the norm,
2. who is not dependent on the approval of others around them, and
3. who functions out of a core or center of firmly-held principles.

- a. An organizing principle for me is “speaking the truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15)
 - b. We speak the truth in love because (according to Eph. 4:25-32)
 - 1) We are members of one body,
 - 2) Satan gets a foothold in our lives when we do not speak truthfully to each other,
 - 3) The power of words to heal and to affirm,
 - 4) Because we have been forgiven in Christ.
 - c. Steve Covey talks about the principles of being proactive, beginning with the end in mind, seeking first to understand, then to be understood, and thinking win/win.
- D. A decisive leader...is a Spirit-led leader.
- 1. The Spirit of God within us gives wisdom to us regarding the issues, large and small, before us.
 - 2. The Spirit of God within us empowers us to reflect the mind of Christ in the relationships we experience, the character qualities which affirm to others the Christ within us.
 - 3. Character qualities such as humility, gentleness, patience, respect, trust, gratitude, encouragement, optimism, vision, and faith.

CHOOSE...TO BE A DECISIVE LEADER.

Conclusion

- 1. Let's return to Joshua...

2. The people responded to his challenge to CHOOSE THE LORD and not those who were their enemies.
3. “We will serve the Lord,” was their response. And they made a covenant with God!
4. What about those choices even now you are facing on this campus? (I alluded to some of these choices earlier in my sermon)
 - a. choices regarding friends who will strengthen you and your faith,
 - b. choices regarding a positive attitude toward resident life,
 - c. choices regarding the seriousness with which you take your academic studies,
 - d. choices regarding accepting the traditions/values/lifestyle guidelines of MVNC,
 - e. choices regarding participating in chapel services as expressions of worship,
 - f. choices regarding becoming a follower of Jesus.
5. Joshua told the Israelites, after challenging them to choose to follow the Lord, AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD.
 - a. I have a prayer. I pray that many of you will write me a note in the next few days, not in the form of a covenant, but as a simple affirmation, AS FOR ME AND MY ROOMMATE, OR AS FOR ME AND MY APARTMENT MATES, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD. WE CHOOSE...THIS WEEK...

TO BE DISCIPLINED STUDENTS,

TO BE DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIANS

AND TO BE DECISIVE LEADERS.

6. Joshua began his sermon by asking the people to recall the faithfulness of God in their lives. I close my sermon by asking you to do the same,
7. Then draw your line in the sand and make critical decisions regarding some choices already before you this school year.
 - a. Begin with the choices I have highlighted in this sermon.
 - b. Let these fundamental choices guide you in the numerous other choices you will face during this school year at MVNC.