

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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John Crosby
Good Advice, Bad Rehoboam
1 Kings 12**

John Ortberg says the biggest difference between people who flourish in their lives and people who just sort of wither or have humdrum lives is not the thing we spend the most time on. It's not mostly about money. A flourishing life is not mostly about being healthy. We do not flourish because of our talent or our good looks or our IQ or lack thereof. Basically, people who flourish have gained wisdom. People who flourish do so because over time, they have increasingly learned to make good decisions. Conversely, people who do not flourish make bad decisions.

According to one study, if you're an average person, you will make about 70 conscious decisions every day. Most of the choices you make, getting up, brushing your teeth, doing all that kind of stuff, are on autopilot; they are not really choices. But almost every day you will make 70 small, big, and in-between conscious decisions. That turns into 25,550 decisions every year. That turns into 1,788,500 decisions if you live 70 years. You put all that together and that is your life. That is who you've become. Albert Camus, the author said, "Life is a sum of all your choices." That's kind of sobering because there are so many decisions and it is so easy to make bad ones.

A huge part of making good decisions or good choices is the advice that you seek out. That's what we are going to talk about today. I thought I'd show you what good and bad choices look like. Let's start with a good choice. [Slide shown.] This is a picture of Felix Baumgartner. He is an Austrian skydiver and he broke two world records that had stood for over 50 years. He smashed the previous world record for the fastest dive, breaking the sound barrier and reaching a velocity of nearly 834 miles per hour. He also broke the world record for the highest freefall, jumping out of a balloon 128,000 feet or 24 miles above New Mexico. This is what it looks like from 24 miles up in the sky. [Slide shown.] When he got to the edge of the space, see the curvature of the earth, he just stepped out and fell 24 miles. He said that he could not have done it without the help of the person who went there 50 years before, Joe Kittinger. The old record holder, 84-year-old Joe Kittinger, and Baumgartner were the only ones who really, really knew what happens up there and the only voice in Baumgartner's head on the way down was Joe Kittinger's. When Baumgartner stood on the ground, he said, "I could not have done it alone. A giant went before me."

He had good advice. That's what we need to make good, healthy decisions. There's a part in the fall where Baumgartner starts to spin out of control and he says, "It was only Joe's voice in my ear saying, 'Start this,' 'Start this' that made me realize how I needed to straighten it out." Good advice is imperative.

I say that because sometimes you need that good advice to come a little louder or a little earlier. I had one of those experiences a couple of years ago. I was on a trip to Africa with Laura and the World Vision board and we met near Victoria Falls in Livingstone, Zambia. [Slide shown.] Beautiful falls! You can see right in front of the falls there is a bridge that goes across the river and on that bridge, people bungee jump. One of my friends was celebrating his 35th wedding anniversary, turning 60, and he and his wife decided to jump together. I went along in the group just to encourage them and sure enough, they did it. But what made it incredible was, as they went to pay, Jim, that's his name, said, "Here's \$125 for me and \$125 for my wife and here's \$125 for *him*," and he pointed at me. All of sudden, things changed. All of a sudden I got some bad advice. This is not something that a 60-year-old person who is more than a little bit overweight does.

I wanted to use this in a sermon someday to talk about the leap of faith. This is the leap of bad advice. What made it even clearer was, several members of the board did it with us. At the next board meeting, they showed another video just like this, only it was of a young woman who jumped off the same bridge and when she got to the bottom, the rope snapped. There are alligators on both sides of the Zambezi River. She fell in, broke her collarbone, and single-handedly with one arm swam to some rocks in the middle where she was rescued. They showed that and then the president talked about the wisdom of his board and how he was wondering about that and how someone had said that the accident with the young woman was because too many really fat people had been jumping off. I have no idea, but what I do know is that the advice you listen to is crucial. It is always important but sometimes it's a matter of life and death. Like my wife Laura said, "What and whom you listen to will determine what you do." I had some bad advice and I listened to it.

We are in a series this summer out of the Books of 1st and 2nd Kings. We're calling it Hidden Gems and I'd like to share with you a hidden gem of how advice can go bad and what you can do to have better advice. Let's take a look again at 1st and 2nd Kings. In the Old Testament 1st and 2nd Kings are one long story, but it's so long they had to cut it in half because the scroll got too fat. 1st Kings is about the golden age, about Saul and David and Solomon and when they leave, it goes from the golden age to the divided kingdom. The first ones there are Jeroboam and Rehoboam. Then the last part of the story of the kings is the beginning of the end where Israel is destroyed.

Today's story comes right at the end of the golden age, right at the beginning of the divided kingdom. It's the story of what happens when the wisest man on earth, Solomon, dies. At the end of his life, King Solomon essentially becomes a pagan. He continues to worship God, but he worships other gods as well and because of what he does, God takes 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel and says, "You cannot be their king anymore. I'm appointing Jeroboam, a relative of yours, to be king over them." Of course, when Jeroboam hears this, he knows that Solomon is going to kill him and so he runs for his life and stays in Egypt. Like Joseph before him, like Moses before him, like Jesus after him. Egypt is a safe haven. Then everybody figures that Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, will be the king when Solomon dies. This is what happens next. Solomon dies.

1 Rehoboam went to Shechem,

Shechem is right in the middle of Israel, a little north of Jerusalem on the map.

for all Israel had gone there to make him king. **2** When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. **3** So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: **4** "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you."

In the last half of Solomon's reign, Solomon becomes more like the Pharaoh of Egypt, treating his people more like servants and slaves, than a king, who is the steward of the kingdom. The people say, "Change that!"

5 Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me." So the people went away. **6** Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. "How would you advise me to answer these people?" he asked. **7** They replied, "If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants." **8** But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. **9** He asked them, "What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, 'Lighten the yoke your father put on us'?" **10** The young men who had grown up with him replied, "These people have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.' Now tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. **11** My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'" **12** Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, "Come back to me in three days." **13** The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, **14** he followed the advice of the young men and said, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions." **15** So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam . . . **16** When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: "What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, Israel! Look after your own house, David!" So the Israelites went home.

Ten of the 12 tribes of Israel rejected Rehoboam and Jeroboam became their king.

17 But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

This is the beginning of the end for Israel. From now on, there will be two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. It will be as if their civil war never ended. They are divided and will fight each other almost every year, and because they keep fighting each other, they become weak at the borders. They lose sight of God and God eventually has them enslaved to someone else. Think of Syria, Iraq, and the Central African Republic. Civil wars destroyed the country so no one could rule; all this because of three days of bad decisions, all this because of taking bad advice.

I've studied a lot about leadership and decision making. I perceive that there are many things that lead to bad decisions. There is, frankly, the fear of embarrassment. People make bad decisions because their first inclination is wrong and they are too embarrassed to admit they are wrong and so they don't turn it around. Some of you are too impulsive to make good decisions.

Tired leaders act impulsively. We had the privilege of interviewing President Clinton seven or eight years ago and talking about Monica Lewinski, I asked him how he could have ever made such a dumb mistake. With my daughter in the room, he looked at us and said, "You know, every bad decision I made was when I was dead tired and my defenses were low and I was not thinking straight." Others of you fear making a decision and that becomes your decision. But as I look at leadership or life, I would suggest that bad decisions primarily come from the inability to listen to good advice.

Rehoboam here desperately wants to be king. He has watched his father, Solomon, the wisest man in the world, and says, "I want to be even better than that," but he sees his father's elders like an extension of his dad and he doesn't listen to them. The story is like this. He turns to people for advice. That's good. But he turns away from tough advice, the hard truth, and that's bad. And then he turns to fools for the tie-breaker and that's not bad; that's tragic. When you say, "Well, I asked for advice," you can always find somebody who will tickle your ears and tell you what you want to hear and you become like Rehoboam. How come so many of us resist wise advice?

Put yourself in this. If you've got to make a decision about work or retirement or relationships or children, about where you live or what you will become, think about these things. Some of you will not get wise counsel because you have not cultivated relationships with wise people. You have not said, "Who in my life could give me good advice?" You hang around in a pack or you just sit by yourself. Some of us resist wise counsel because we don't want to listen to advice that is not what we want to hear. "I don't want advice. I want affirmation." That's where I live.

I had a chance to play tennis occasionally with Gene Sit of Sit Investments. Gene was the founder of the company, a great guy. In 2008 we are in the locker room. I can distinctly remember this. We were downtown in the locker room after we played and I'm asking him for financial advice because the elections are coming up and I'm not sure how it's going to go. He goes, "I'm telling you, there's trouble ahead." This is like February or March 2008. "The markets are out of whack." I said, Laura and I are thinking that the kids are out of the house and we want to get a new house closer to the church. He said, "It can be a great time to buy. You would have a huge discount in the real estate market," this is 10 months ahead of the crash, "but whatever you do, sell your house first before you buy another house." I thought "Good advice!" but the problem was that we had already found the perfect house. I kept thinking of Gene saying, "Sell your house first," but the realtor said, "The market is strong. It could take a couple of months to sell your house." I said, "Well, we can afford that" so we bought the second house. I resisted the advice of somebody who knew much better and for the next 18 months, we owned two houses. Everything slowed down and we didn't so much sell our first house as we gave it away. I had good advice but I wanted to go my own way. Some of us don't listen to good counsel because we are saying, "This is different. I'll show them!" Do you know what the Bible calls those people? It calls them fools. Proverbs 12:15,

15 The way of fools seems right to them

"I know best. This is different. I'll show them." "The way of fools seems right to them" I just love that phrase. Isn't that the way it seems to you? If you want to make a decision that seems right, it grows on you. That's because you are a fool. A part of what it means to be a fool is that more and more, you don't want to have somebody telling you something different. There's a fool in me and there is a fool in you. Let's make this apply to every single one of us. Would you right now turn to the person next to you and say, "There is a fool sitting in your chair." Go ahead.

Some of you have been waiting for years to be able to say that. “The preacher said I should say it!” That’s just the way it is.” Left to our own devices, we are all fools. The way Proverbs 12:15 ends is like this:

15 The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.

The difference between a fool and being wise is not that the wise person is smarter. It is that the wise listen to advice. A coachable spirit is central to becoming wise. We all need that. Do you want proof? Just go to a courtroom any day of the week and listen to people trying to explain bad decisions to the judge. “Well, they must have changed the speed limit.” “I didn’t know what was happening.” “How was I supposed to know that she would do that?” Nobody sitting in a courtroom is there because they had a wise, loving, trustworthy person courageously speaking truth into their lives about decisions they were going to make. We are all fools.

I have more in common with Rehoboam than I’d like to admit, and the chances are, you do too. When I make my mind up about something, I really don’t want somebody telling me how I should change my course. Every human being knows that feeling. That’s why God in His wisdom has placed women and men around each one of us with the experience and discernment we lack, and if we are wise enough to listen, they’ll help us flourish. Good advice is hard to find.

Rehoboam got advice that was good *and* bad. How do we tell the difference? Well, he had to find good advisors, so you need to start this process by looking for wise people *before* you jump off the bridge. By the time you get to the edge of the bridge, there are so many things going on, it’s hard to make a good decision. Look for wise people beforehand. I thought I’d give you what I see as three marks of a wise counselor.

The first would be that I would look for advice from people whose living validates their decisions. In other words, if I am talking to somebody about money, I don’t want to talk to somebody who has been bankrupt four times. If I need relationship advice, I want to talk to somebody who has a solid marriage. If I’m having trouble with my kids, I want to look at the children of the person I’m talking to. We need to look for people whose lives validate the advice that they give instead of just taking a poll of the next four people who walk through the door.

I think the second mark of a wise counselor is that they listen more than they prescribe. Laura and I had the privilege of being with a naturally born leader for lunch last month. He clearly was the smartest guy at the table. He had taken a church and grown it immensely. He was in charge of a nationwide ministry and he was brilliant. But I don’t know that I would go to him for advice because nobody else could get a word in edgewise. I don’t think he would listen to my problem long enough before he would say, “I know how to do that. I know how to fix that.” You need to find somebody who will listen to your heart.

The third thing that is the mark of a wise counselor is someone who loves truth more than approval. I had an experience like that this past week. I am sending a letter out to you about the denominational stuff that you will get in a couple of weeks. I was tweaking the letter and I sent a copy to several people. One of the people came in and said, “I love this letter, great tone, but I think I’d change these three things,” and each of the three things he would change were like Boom! Boom! Boom! And I, being a pastor, am going, well, I’ll pray about that. Okaaay, I’ll give

in on that one. It took courage for that person to come into my office, and I need to pray that he will continue to love truth more than my approval and I also need to apologize to him.

Do you have somebody like that in your life? For King David, it was Nathan the prophet. When David sinned with Bathsheba and got away with it, Nathan comes into court and in front of everybody tells the story. "There is a rich guy and a poor guy, and the rich guy steals the only thing of value from the poor guy. What do you think we should do?" And King David says "That just won't do. Bring him in here!" And Nathan goes, "That's you!" He said that in front of everybody and David listened.

When David is on his deathbed at the end of his life, he just wants to die. "Let me just die, okay?" But he had promised that Solomon would be king after him. Now there was social unrest and Solomon was not easily going to be king. Nathan goes to David on his deathbed and chastises him. "David, David, come on, one more thing. You've got to make sure that Solomon becomes king." "Go away. Go away." "No, I'm not kidding you. Don't mess this up." And David listened and got up off of his deathbed and made sure that Solomon became king after him. Everyone needs a Nathan and everyone needs a willingness to listen because **God's primary will for your life is not the things that you will do; it is the person that you are becoming.** Let me say that again. God's primary will for you is not the job you take or the city where you live or whether or not you get married or are single or what house you ought to be in, God's primary will for your life is that you become a magnificent person made in His image, someone with the character of Jesus. That is God's main will for your life. And may I tell you that no circumstance can prevent that but you need advice to get there because **what and who you listen to will determine what you do and what you become.**

That is why it is so great that we are ending up here at the table because I wanted to leave you with one more thing about this idea of good and bad decisions. The Gospel convinces me that it is not the number of great decisions that I make that saves me. It is not the quality of decisions that I make that saves me. Some of you are sitting here thinking, "Why didn't you preach this sermon 17 years ago? It's too late. I already made a decision so bad that it's in the it-cannot-be-redeemed category," whether that was a marriage that's over or the alienating of a child or a terrible investment. "I can't get back from there."

Listen to me. **We are not saved by the quality of our decisions. We are all of us saved by the grace of our God. That's why the Gospel is called the good news.** You do not have to figure it out. You do not have to get it right. You just have to turn to the God of grace. At the very end of Jesus' life, He is hanging on the cross between two thieves who deserve the sentence they have received, death. Every day of their lives, these guys made terrible decisions, 70 bad decisions a day, 25,000 a year. If they live to be 40, that's a million bad decisions. A million bad decisions that led to hanging on a cross. They're thieves, corrupt, deceitful, and greedy. Then the very last decision one of them makes is to cast his life into Jesus' care. "Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." And Jesus says, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." **There is no decision you have made that God cannot forgive and redeem.**

Come to the table and be assured of that. The Bible says that when we come together for Communion, we should set aside time and examine ourselves. We should examine our lives, see where we have gone astray or where we are flat. I'd like us to do that here today in light of decisions that we have been making these days, these weeks, these years, but I'd like to do it a little differently today because every single one of us has a different need for wisdom. As I start

to pray, if anybody has a particular need for wisdom, if anybody here is facing a big decision or is confused or the stakes are high and you want prayer for wisdom, I'm going to ask you to stand up. We're all going to have our eyes closed so nobody else will know, but please stand if you feel like you need help in the area of wisdom. Sometimes it just helps to do something physically, to say with your whole self, "God, I want to ask for wisdom." When I mention the area of your life in this prayer, I'd like you to just quietly stand, but this will only work if we all close our eyes, so let's close our eyes.

Lord God, some of us are facing decisions in a significant area of our lives. Maybe some of us are parents or grandparents and there is a difficulty or a challenge there. Maybe it's in a work life where you feel stuck and are looking for a job and you don't know what to do. If that's you, would you just please stand? Maybe in your marriage right now, there is something difficult. Maybe in your financial life, you are facing pressure and you don't know what to do or you haven't been giving the way you want to give. You'd like wisdom so you can live life wisely. If that's you, would you stand? Maybe whether you are single or married, there is a relationship that's troubling you, or no relationship, or there's a really difficult person in your life and you feel stuck. Would you stand? Maybe you need wisdom about how you spend your time, whether you're a kid or retired or in the rat race in between. You feel kind of stagnant; you've hit a plateau with God or you feel guilty about something. If that's you, why don't you stand? And if there's any area where you are facing significant decisions or you don't feel wise or you need guidance from God, would you just stand right now? God sees you; nobody else needs to.

Lord God, You say that any of us who lack wisdom should ask You for it and You will give it to us. You want to give all of Your children the ability to make decisions that honor You. We come to this table not because we are wise but because we are not. We come for forgiveness when we have not been wise or brave or honest or kind or faithful and we ask You for the courage to say, "I need help." Send us good counselors; send us good advice, Lord Jesus. Send us the wisdom that comes from above as we gather around this table. May the coming forward bring us forgiveness and may the eating together bring us a sense of Your Spirit's wisdom. May all this be done because You love us like parents love their children. Amen.

Please be seated.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.