

Lesson 20: Decisions (Part 1)

Introduction When we share our faith with our friends our main objective should be to encourage them to be followers of Jesus. Jesus didn't say, "Go therefore and inform all the nations!" He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations!" This is our commission and the goal of our Bible studies is to help our friends make a decision to follow Jesus. Unfortunately, this is often the weak point. We know how to cast the fishing line and hook the fish, but we don't know how to reel it in to land. We know how to sow, but we often don't know how to harvest. Jesus wants us to see the fruits of our labors and He wants us to not only be sowers but harvesters.

A Sensitive Matter Leading people to make a decision for Christ is a very sensitive matter. If we aren't careful, our attempts could be seen as manipulation. Of course we don't want that to happen because manipulation is incompatible with the gospel. In order to lead our friends into a relationship with Jesus Christ without the appearance of manipulation it is necessary to follow certain principles, which Jesus exemplified through His life.

Review In module 3 lessons 5 and 6, we learned how we can win people's hearts and lead them step by step to Jesus. These lessons are the foundation for this lesson. Please review these lessons and reflect on the principles that were discussed.

Principle #1 **It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict people.**

Conversion is always the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible compares it to the resurrection of a dead person. This is something that only God can do.

Quote #1 "It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince the soul of its need of Christ."
(*Evangelism, p. 283*)

Knowing that it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict frees us from the pressure of feeling that we have to convert people. Moreover, we couldn't convert people even if we wanted to. We can explain God's Word and encourage them to make a decision. But it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict people.

Conversion is *always* the work of the Holy Spirit, but it isn't *only* the work of the Holy Spirit. Every person has the freedom to choose if they will follow God. The Holy Spirit convicts, encourages, and urges, but He never forces a decision. Every person must make a free will decision to surrender to Christ. However, let us not forget that God also uses believers to call other people to make a decision, a task that is both biblical and necessary! Can God directly call people to make a decision without our help? Of course He can, if He wants to, and sometimes He does! But He likes to use us as His tools. The Bible often refers to conversion as spiritual rebirth (see John 3:3-5). Therefore we can say that the people God uses to lead others to Christ are birth attendants.



What biblical examples can you think of, where God used people to call others to make a decision?

Principle #2 Pay attention to your own spiritual life.

If conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, it is important that we ourselves be converted by the Holy Spirit so that He can work through us. Our own spiritual condition plays a major role in helping people make a decision to follow Jesus.

Principle #3 The freedom of decision is a privilege and responsibility.

The freedom of decision is a privilege and our decisions shape our lives. God wants us to make our decisions maturely and of our own free will. Decisions that are made under pressure, or by manipulation, have no value or stability. We must always respect and protect the freedom of decision, even when someone says “no” or “not yet”. People have this right!

A key component of free choice is responsibility. Thus, we are must take responsibility for the decisions we make. When conducting Bible studies be sure to emphasize our responsibility to God.

Principle #4 Be aware that all conversions are not the same.

Conversions don’t all follow the same pattern. The conversion experiences of people can be very different. It is important to understand this so that we don’t have any false expectations.

Quote #2

“Conversions are not all alike. Jesus impresses the heart, and the sinner is born again to new life. Often souls have been drawn to Christ when there was no violent conviction, no soul rending, no remorseful terrors. They looked upon an uplifted Saviour; they lived. They saw the soul’s need; they saw the Saviour’s sufficiency and His claims; they heard His voice saying, “Follow Me,” and they rose up and followed Him. This conversion was genuine, and the religious life was just as decided as was that of others who suffered all the agony of a violent process.” (*Evangelism, p. 287*)

People grow at different rates

We also need to keep in mind that people grow and make decisions at different rates. Jesus always remembered this. Nicodemus needed a lot of time and Jesus sowed and cultivated the seed in Him. In John 3 we don’t find any appeal for a decision. Jesus knew that Nicodemus wasn’t ready yet and treated him accordingly. Jesus dealt with Matthew in a completely different manner. He immediately said to him, “Follow me!” Clearly the Holy Spirit had already prepared him.

The speed by which people make decisions can suddenly change. For example, eye opening experiences and personal crises can cause us to make drastic changes very quickly. This is why it is important that we always keep our eyes open.

Think of some examples from the Bible or from your circle of friends for slow and quick conversions.



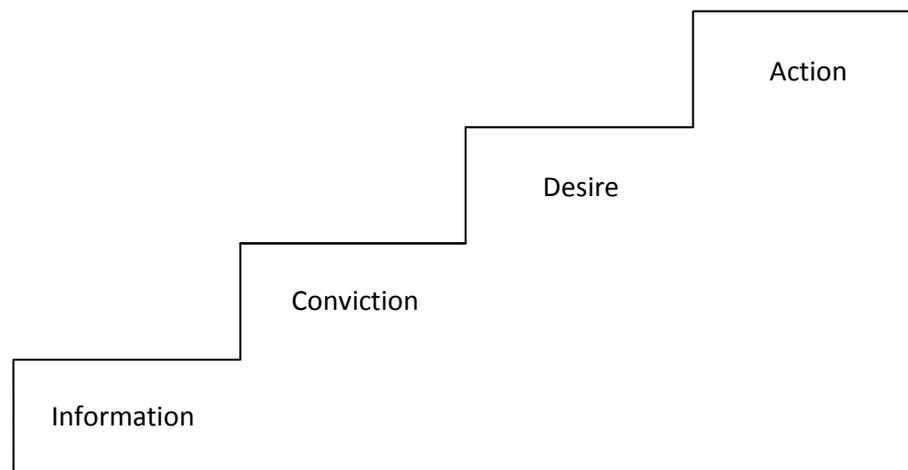
Steps to Jesus The individual steps can be described as follows:



Since conversion takes place in many small steps it is necessary to make an appeal at every Bible study.

Principle #7 Pay attention to the 4 steps of the decision making process.

God created our ability to make decisions in such a way that every well thought through decision goes through 4 steps. They are:



We go through these 4 steps when we are buying a car or making a decision to be baptized. Before we make a decision to buy a car we first need enough information about the car. Not until then can we be convinced that this car is really a good deal. A desire to buy the car grows out of this conviction. Only when this desire is present will we act.

We also go through these 4 steps when making spiritual decisions. For example, let's take the decision to keep the Sabbath. The 4 steps in the decision process look like this:

1. Information: I know that the Sabbath is the right day.
2. Conviction: I know that I should keep the Sabbath.
3. Desire: I want to keep the Sabbath.
4. Action: I start keeping the Sabbath.

In order to help our friends make good decisions we have to understand which step they are on in the decision making process.

- Has he understood the necessary information about the Sabbath?
- Is he convicted that he should keep the Sabbath?
- Does he have the desire to keep the Sabbath?

A person can't be convicted or have the desire to keep the Sabbath when they don't have all the information. On the other hand, it is useless to give more information when the person is already convicted and has the desire to keep the Sabbath, but is afraid he will lose his job because of the Sabbath.

In order to understand what step our friend is at it is important to ask the right questions. In the next lesson we will deal with this topic in detail.

Principle #8 Use the power of God's word.

When we endeavor to lead people to a decision we must always be aware that we are acting under God's authority. It should therefore be clear that God is calling them to make a decision and not us. This only works when there are clear statements concerning this in the Bible. With the Word of God we have to...

- Give them all the necessary information so that they have a clear picture and there is no doubt about what God says about it.
- Give them statements, which convince them that God expects them to put a truth into practice.
- Show them statements that awaken a desire to put these decisions into practice.

When we answer their questions and objections with Bible verses, we are stepping aside and presenting the truth to them with God's Word, which is "living and powerful" (Hebrews 4:12). God called the world into being with His Word. The same creative power is still in His Word.

Mark Finley wrote:

Quote #3

"The Bible is God's dynamic agency for soul winning. No man or woman can be effective as a soul winner unless they know how to use the right text to generate decisions. ... No book carries as much power as the Word of God for enabling men and women to make decisions; no method is as powerful as taking texts of the Bible and applying them in real life situations. In talking to a person about making a decision, one might say, "In my opinion," or "I think," or "My church teaches." But these expressions carry little weight. However, when you and I can open our Bibles and read a text that tells people what God says, that shares with them the will of Christ for their lives, we have enlisted powerful agencies for change." (Mark Finley, *Persuasion – How to Help People Decide for Jesus*, p. 12-13)

Therefore, it is important that we commit Bible texts to memory so we can give the right answer from God's Word in response to questions, fears, and objections. This will also help us convince a person to go God's way.

In the attachment you will find a list of Bible texts for many different situations.

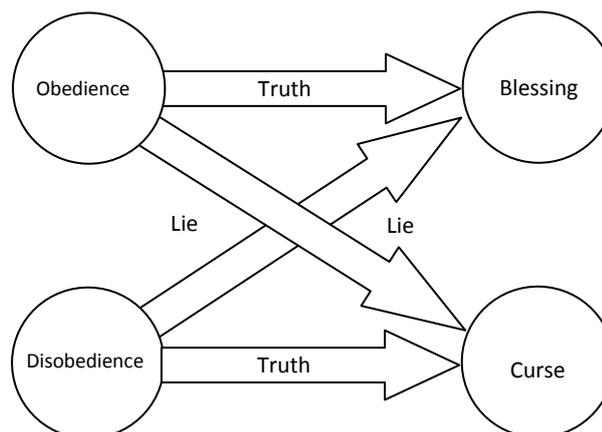
Principle #9 Link every decision with Jesus.

Each decision only makes sense in the context of a relationship with Jesus. People shouldn't keep the Sabbath or get baptized because the law requires it, but because they love Jesus. This is why it is important to first help them to get to know and love Jesus and to decide to follow Him. When they understand that a topic is important to Jesus, then their conviction to accept it and put it into practice will grow.

Principle #10 Depict the consequences of a decision.

Every decision that we make has consequences. It is easy for us to make a good decision when the gain is greater than the cost. For example, when someone decides to go to university, the gain that he will receive when he gets a good job (higher salary, better career opportunities, and more joy in his work) seems greater than the effort and sacrifices he will make while he studies. In our spiritual life it is the same way, though at first it sounds quite selfish.

God described over and over in the Bible the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience. The problem is that Satan twists the truth and people believe that following God only brings disadvantages, while disobedience brings a lot of advantages. As long as people harbor these false concepts they will never make a decision to follow Jesus. This is why it is so important for us to show them from the Bible the benefits of being obedient and the disasters that result from disobedience. We want to show them how Jesus improves the quality of our lives when we follow Him and how tragic it is when we decide against Him. This thought must run like a golden thread through each Bible study.



When the Holy Spirit woos a person to make a decision, Satan tries everything he can to make it look as horrible as possible. It is our duty to face this lie with the truth.

But it isn't that simple! We cannot honestly say that following Jesus will only bring advantages and disobedience will only bring disadvantages. Discipleship requires sacrifice and choosing the world over Christ can have some material advantages. Therefore we have to explain 2 things to the people:

- The blessing that Jesus gives us today is much greater than anything the world promises.
- In the long run, obedience always brings blessings, even when it requires sacrifice along the way. Likewise, sin results in self destruction. We must always show people this perspective.



Consider what advantages there are to following Jesus and what disadvantages arise when we decide to disobey. Can you think of any Bible texts to support these?

The Blessing of Obedience	The Curse of Disobedience

Challenge

1. Continue to pray for the people on your prayer list and keep your eyes open for the opportunity to do something good for them and to give them spiritual guidance.
2. Keep praying specifically for a person that you can give personal Bible studies to.



Please study **Acts 17:1-15** carefully and take notes on the content, meaning, and life applications in those verses. Be sure to write down good questions for each.

Bible Study

What does the Bible text say?
(content, meaning, application)

How can I ask questions about this?
(Questions on content, meaning, and application)

