

CHILDREN

Hard Choices



SERIES BIG IDEA

Because life is filled with hard choices, we must rely upon the wisdom found in God's Word.

Lesson 2.1

The Voices You Listen To

Lesson 2.2

Habits of the Heart

Lesson 2.3

Vision

Lesson 2.4

Values



Hard Choices: The Voices You Listen To

BLUEPRINT

SERIES BIG IDEA

Because life is filled with hard choices, we must rely on the wisdom found in God's Word.

SERIES MEMORY PASSAGE

Colossians 3:2

LESSON BIG IDEA

When facing life's tough decisions, we must listen to wise voices.

BIBLICAL PASSAGE


Proverbs 13:20

STUDENTS WILL differentiate between wise and foolish voices.

Early Elementary (Grades 1-3)

TOOL BOX

FOUNDATION

- Powerpoint 2.1 
- 1 unopened can of Coca-Cola and 3 unopened cans of other soda (all the same or different—just not Coca-Cola)
- Piece of cardboard
- Small cups (optional)


FRAME

- Series 2 memory verse poster (**TRP**)
- 8 small pieces of paper (4 with the word “foolish” and 4 with the word “wise”)
- 4 Tyvek envelopes (i.e., from post office, FedEx, or UPS) and 4 regular paper envelopes
- Visual: King Rehoboam (**TRP**)
- Visual: Widow woman (**TRP**)

FINISH

- Activity paper and pencils


SELAH

- Song: “Voice of Truth” by Casting Crowns
- Series song and lyrics: “Hard Choices” 

Late Elementary (Grades 4-6)

TOOL BOX

FOUNDATION

- Powerpoint 2.1 
- 1 unopened can of Coca-Cola and 3 unopened cans of other soda (all the same or different—just not Coca-Cola)
- Piece of cardboard
- Small cups (optional)
- Paper, pencils and a bowl or small box


FRAME

- Series 2 memory verse poster (**TRP**)
- 8 small pieces of paper (4 with the word “foolish” and 4 with the word “wise”)
- 4 Tyvek envelopes (i.e., from post office, FedEx, or UPS) and 4 regular paper envelopes
- Visual: King Rehoboam (**TRP**)
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FINISH

- Activity paper and pencils

SELAH


- Song: “Voice of Truth” by Casting Crowns
- Series song and lyrics: “Hard Choices” 



FOUNDATION

Early Elementary (1-3)

Late Elementary (4-6)

Sing the series song  "Hard Choices," at any time during this lesson. It is an additional learning tool for teachers to access. Download the link and sing along with Apostolic young people singing to the Lord.

The Real Thing?

Place four cans of soda on a table in front of the students. Of the four cans of soda, one should be Coca-Cola and the other three should be different sodas. Ensure students get a good look at the cans, and then place cardboard in front of the cans to hide them from students' view. Now mix up the positions of the cans.

Coca-Cola used to have a slogan that it was "The Real Thing." I'm going to open each one of these cans of soda. I want you to tell me, after I'm done, which one was the Coca-Cola, "the real thing," by listening to the sound. Is the "real thing" the first, second, third, or fourth can opened? (Open each can one at a time.)

- **Which one do you think is Coca-Cola?**

Guided Practice and Reflection

- **Why it is important to follow wise advice?**
- **Ask students to share a time they followed foolish advice and what happened. (Begin by sharing a personal experience.)**
- ☆ **How do you know if the advice you are getting is wise or foolish?**

(Reveal to them which one it was and explain there was no accurate way of knowing which one it was.) The cans of soda all sounded the same when I opened them because they were made the exact same way. However, just because the sound they made was the same doesn't mean they will taste the same. They will, in fact, taste different because of what is on the inside. Sometimes people will come into our lives and they will want to give us ideas and advice. We must be careful to choose who we will listen to and discern if they are wise or foolish. (If it is appropriate, pour the open sodas into small cups and share them with the students.)

Option 2 Activity

Brainstorm

Have students form pairs to discuss the following questions. Read the questions one at a time and give students time to discuss their thoughts with each other.

- **Would you choose to visit Disney World or the Grand Canyon? Why?**
- **Ice cream or cupcakes for dessert? Why?**
- **An iPad or a laptop? Why?**
- **Vegetables or pizza? Why?**
- **Would you choose to go to church or to the mall? Why?**
- **Would you choose to lie or tell the truth if you knew you would get in trouble for telling the truth? Why?**

Option 2 Activity

Brainstorm

There are some things in life that we shouldn't have to ask for advice for what to do. For example, when you wake up in the morning, you should not have to ask your parents if you need to brush your teeth; you know you should. When you are eating a cheeseburger, you should not have to ask anyone if you need to chew it before swallowing. However, in life we will encounter difficult situations when we may not know what to do.

- **What are some difficult situations we face in life?**
- **When did you or someone you know need advice to help make a difficult decision?**

Write

Have students write down the situations they brainstormed on a piece of paper. If they can't think of a situation, let them know they can be creative and write one that they imagine. Have them turn in their papers, folded up and placed into a bowl or box. Draw out four or five examples and read them to the class. There is no need to share who wrote them. Ask students to share what they think would have been wise and foolish choices.

FRAME

Early Elementary (1-3)

Late Elementary (4-6)

MEMORY VERSE: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2).

Memory Verse Echo

Have all the students stand. Display the memory verse poster. One word at a time, have students echo the verse back to you. Then have them echo the verse back to you in different ways: use a high voice, medium voice, robot voice, low voice, slow voice, fast voice.

Reflection

- **What are “things above”?**
- **What are “things on the earth”?**
- **What does it mean to have affection for something?**
- **Why should we love the “things above” more than those of earth?**

Memory Verse Echo

Ask all students to stand. Display the memory verse poster. One word at a time, have students echo the verse back to you. Then repeat the process, but purposely say an incorrect word. Let students know that if anyone echoes back an incorrect word, he or she must sit down. Continue until one student is standing. Use only one incorrect word per round. Then start over from the very beginning, only this time without the verse being displayed anymore.

Reflection

Ask students to differentiate between “things above” and “things on this earth.” What do they think this means?

Every day we are faced with choices and decisions. Sometimes we will make decisions that are difficult but will be pleasing to our Father in Heaven, or we will make decisions that appear to make our lives easier on earth but are simply wrong.

Ask students whether the following decisions are focusing on the “things above” or “things on the earth.” Have students put their thumbs up if the statement focuses on “things above” and thumbs down if it focuses on “things on the earth.”

- Cheating on a test so you can get an “A.”
- Admitting to your parents that you broke a lamp when no one was around.
- Saying no and walking away from the cool kids at school when they ask you to do something you know is wrong.
- Taking money out of your mom’s purse without asking because you don’t have enough money to buy a candy bar.
- Apologizing to a friend when you accidentally hurt her feelings.

Memory Verse Teamwork

Have students stand if their first names begin with the letters A-J. (This is team one.) Have team one read the verse and sit down. Next have students stand if their names start with K-Z. (This is team two.)

Have team two read the verse and sit down. Randomly call out team one or team two and have them stand to say the verse. Use any pattern you would like for calling the teams. Challenge students to say the verse with enthusiasm. Reward the most enthusiastic team with applause. Repeat the activity by calling on the groups several times to say the verse until they can say it from memory.

Biblical Passage: Proverbs 13:20 *Guided Practice*

Read Proverbs 13:20 together.

Proverbs 13 is one of many books that King Solomon wrote. When we talk about wisdom, many times we think of King Solomon, because when God told Solomon that He would give him whatever he asked for, Solomon asked for wisdom.

The verse speaks of walking with wise men. This means more than just simply taking a walk with them. This means purposely spending time with them on a regular basis. When you spend time with wise people, you listen to their thoughts and you slowly begin to think like them and become wise.

Early Elementary (1-3)

Late Elementary (4-6)

However, when you are a companion or a friend of foolish people, Proverbs declares you are destroyed. In other words, you learn and live the foolish ways and your life can become broken.

Independent Practice

Before class, write the word “wise” on four pieces of paper and place them in four Tyvek envelopes and seal them. Write the word “wise” on the outside of the envelopes. Next write “foolish” on four pieces of paper and seal them inside four regular paper envelopes. Write the word “foolish” on the outside of these envelopes.

Hand out the envelopes to eight students. Let them know what word is inside their envelopes. The object of the game is to see who can open the envelope and get the word out the fastest, without damaging the word inside. Tell them to start. (The Tyvek envelopes will be impossible to simply tear in half. The regular envelopes will be easily torn.) After a short time, stop and congratulate the “foolish” envelope group for winning. Ask them to show their envelopes and papers.

Your envelopes represented people who have foolishness inside. Because of their foolishness, they will be destroyed. Ask the “wise” to raise their envelopes. Those who had wisdom inside kept it. Their “wisdom” is safe in the envelope and they are not destroyed. When you have wisdom, life may seem very difficult. However, with wisdom you will remain strong, unlike those who walk with fools, for they will be destroyed!

Bible Lesson

Use PowerPoint 2.1 or lesson visuals provided.

- **Who is the wisest person you have ever met?**
- **What makes you think this person is wise?**



Show the King Rehoboam visual (TRP). King Rehoboam listened to the fanfare of trumpets blaring in his ears. He could hardly believe this day of celebration had arrived! He leaned forward on the marble balcony of the palace and scrutinized the city and lands that surrounded him. This great kingdom, once ruled by his wise father, King Solomon, belonged to him. He raised his arm and waved to the crowd standing on the ground below. It was great to be king! He could do anything he wanted. He had power to make laws. He had everything he could ever want. His purple robe and golden sandals reflected the torch light of the grand hallway as he descended the steps to the waiting multitudes.

The weary people of Israel stood outside the palace courtyard in the hot afternoon sun. Excitedly they welcomed their new king. Temples, ships, golden shields, and an impressive treasury told the story of their hard work and loyalty. During Solomon’s reign these faithful subjects worked tirelessly to build this impressive kingdom. The people greeted King Rehoboam with thunderous applause. They bowed reverently to the earth on sore, worn-out knees. They pleaded with him in unison and begged him not to make them work as hard as his father had demanded. King Rehoboam was puzzled with the request of the people. He


was a new king and did not know what to do. He thought his father was a great king. He stared at the people and pondered his choices. He thoughtfully gazed at the horizon. In the distance he saw a fleet of ships that had just returned to the kingdom loaded with cargo. His mind went blank; this decision was difficult. He told the people to come back in three days and he would give them his answer.

The next day the morning sun slanted through the palace columns as the king went to talk to his father’s advisors. Old men with white hair sat around the carved stone table as they had for so many years. Their familiar faces smiled kindly as King Rehoboam presented his dilemma. His father’s mentors thought for a moment and then spoke. They told him that if he would be a king to the people, not making them work so hard, they would be loyal to him and serve him forever. King Rehoboam looked at them doubtfully. He was not sure if this was the right choice. After all, these were old men. *Maybe there is someone with better advice*, he thought. He decided to ask his friends what they thought.

King Rehoboam’s buddies lounged around the palace garden. He knew they didn’t have any experience advising a king, but he decided to ask them what he should do anyway. The young men told him to be really mean to the people and make them work even harder. Now he had a choice to make. Who should he listen to?

Early Elementary (1-3)

It was the third day. The crowd surrounded the palace and waited for an answer from their new king. Rehoboam told the people he had made his decision. He had decided to listen to the young men. He told the people that they were going to have to work even harder than they did when his dad was king. An angry crowd left the palace that day and refused to follow Rehoboam as king. The king refused to listen to them and they refused to work for him. They rebelled and refused to follow his commands. Rehoboam listened to the advice of the young men and made a bad choice! His choice cost him his kingdom. The voices we listen to influence the choices we make.

 *Show the Widow Woman visual (TRP).* In another time and place, a woman who had a choice to make. She was not a king, just a simple widow with a son. She wiped the sweat from her forehead as she wandered to her garden through what once was a thriving pasture. Her cows, goats, and sheep were all dead. Grass and flowers that once bloomed were replaced with brown stalks covered in dust. Her once-lush garden was a heap of dead stems and leaves. She knelt on the garden mound and dug desperately. If only she could find a carrot root or a potato! Her wrinkled hands grasped something hard in the soil, but it was only a rock. Disappointed, she got up and headed back up the path. She gathered a few sticks to make the last meal. She knew soon she and her son would starve to death.

As she placed the sticks on the fire pit, she heard footsteps approaching. She turned around, startled to see the prophet Elijah! The man of God asked her for a drink of water. The widow obediently went in the house and brought her water pot out for the prophet. She poured him a drink, secretly hoping he wouldn't ask for something to eat. Her ears rang with his words; he had asked her to make him some dinner. She heard herself explaining to him that she was preparing a final meal, and then she and her son would die. Elijah told her that if she would make a cake for him, God would continue to provide for her and her son. The prophet promised they would


Late Elementary (4-6)

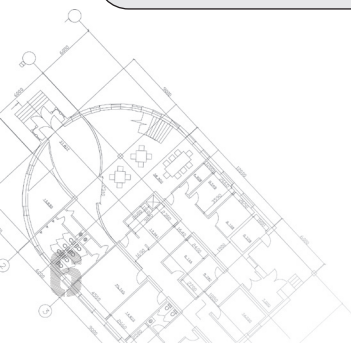
have food to eat. This was a tough choice to make! The widow looked hesitantly at her depleted flour bag and bottle of oil. Should she listen to her thoughts? Her mind yelled, *This is all the food you have and you won't have any more!* Then she thought of the words of the man of God. His words told her how God would perform a miracle if she would trust. What voice would she listen to? What choice would she make?

She chose to listen to the words of the prophet. She willingly made him a cake. As the fire crackled and the cake baked on the open flame, she knew she had made the right choice. The fragrant aroma of cake filled the outdoor air and peace filled the widow's heart. Every time she went back to get more flour and oil to make dinner, she had enough. The widow made a wise choice and she and her son lived. She listened to the right voice.

Play "Guess Who" to conclude today's lesson. Choose a volunteer and ask him to leave the room. Choose three students to say the volunteer's name when he returns. Blindfold the volunteer when he returns to the room. Have the chosen students call the volunteer's name one at a time. The volunteer must guess who is calling his name. If the volunteer guesses at least one student correctly, then he can choose a student to be the guesser. Choose three new students to be "voices" and repeat the activity.

Discussion Questions:

- **Why do you think Rehoboam decided to listen to his friends instead of the elders?**
- **Was the decision Rehoboam made a wise choice? Why or why not?**
- **Was the decision the widow woman made a wise choice? Why or why not?**
- ☆ **What conclusions can you draw about the importance of the voices you listen to and the choices you make?**
- **How is our future affected by our choices to listen to wise or foolish voices?**
-  ☆ **How can we discern or tell if someone is speaking wise or foolish words?**



FINISH

Early Elementary (1-3)

Review the instructions for page two of the activity paper—Family Connection—and give students a chance to discuss how they will carry out this assignment. Offer a reward for those who return the Family Connection, if it is possible. The curriculum will provide time during the Foundation portion of class next week to discuss the activity.

Activity Paper

Ask students to complete the activity, “Search for Wisdom.”

Late Elementary (4-6)

Wise Man Says



Play “Wise Man Says.” This is simply “Simon Says,” but replace the word “Simon” with the words “wise man.” Students who decide to follow commands not given by the wise man are out until there is only one left standing.

Activity Paper

Ask students to complete the word search in the activity paper.

SELAH

Prayer



Pray with students. Remind students that God’s Word tells us if we ask for wisdom, God will give it to us. Have students pray with each other that God will give them wisdom. Pray that all the students will make wise choices.

Music and Reflection

Play the song “Voice of Truth” by Casting Crowns, or play the series song “Hard Choices.” Encourage students to think about the words.

- **What voice does God want us to hear and follow? Why?**
- **How can we change our lives by listening to the right voices?**

YOUTH

Hard Choices

A series by J. Mark Jordan



SERIES BIG IDEA

Because life is filled with hard choices, we must rely upon the wisdom found in God's Word.

Lesson 2.1

The Voices You Listen To

Lesson 2.2

Habits of the Heart

Lesson 2.3

Vision

Lesson 2.4

Values

Hard Choices

The Voices You Listen To

BLUEPRINT

SERIES BIG IDEA

Because life is filled with hard choices, we must rely upon the wisdom found in God's Word.

LESSON BIG IDEA

When we are forced to face inevitable, tough life decisions, we ought to listen to the wise voices.

LEARNING TARGET

To identify wise leaders and allow them to guide us in difficult times.

KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

1 Kings 17:10–16

SUPPLIES

famous inspirational quotes, paper, pens

FOUNDATION

Sir Isaac Newton, the renowned scientist of the 1600s, observed an apple falling from a tree one day. His inquisitive mind began to wonder why. The conventional wisdom of the day was that the apple was propelled toward the ground by gravity, a mysterious stand-alone force that had to be accepted as it was. Newton would not accept this simple explanation. Instead, he reasoned that every cause had a related effect. Therefore, some force must have caused the action, and that force was most likely the result of a relationship between the apple and the earth.

This led Newton to theorize that the gravitational force of the earth pulls everything toward the ground. He determined that a universal attraction affects all masses of matter through the force of gravity. We now call this the theory of universal gravitation. Going further, Newton posited that not only does the earth propel the apple toward it by the force of gravity, but the apple also pulls the earth toward it by that same force—that force being a coefficient of the mass of the object. In other words, the greater the mass of an object, the greater the gravitational force it exerts.

There is not a person nor an object in our universe, whether great or small, whose existence is unaffected by gravity.

In the same way, every person in your circle of family, friends, and acquaintances affects you. Conversely, you also have an effect on every other person in your universe. This creates an enormous and complex network of interdependent people, all of them connected to each other in some way, whether directly or indirectly. The things we hear, see, and feel in other people in our network exert either a positive or negative force on us.

Opening Discussion:

- Whose advice do you generally ask for? Whose advice do you usually listen to?
- Why might our friends not be the best people to get advice from?

Middle-School Exercise:

1. Before class, compile some inspirational quotes from people like Martin Luther King Jr., some presidents, and some bad people, like dictators or criminals, along with some that you made up yourself. Leave the sources off of the quotes.
2. Read, or have your students read, these quotes out loud and have students choose five, without knowing who wrote them, that they think are the most inspirational or reliable.
3. Discuss how, even though the advice may sound good, it is always important to verify the intentions behind that advice and who the advice is coming from.




Senior-High Exercise:

1. Compile a series of inspirational quotes, but remove the sources from the quotes.
2. Hand out paper and pens to students. Have each student write an inspirational quote and leave his or her name off of it. The quotes should be from various sources, both good and bad: presidents, dictators, criminals, and so forth.
3. Read the quotes out loud to the class and have them divide them into a good or bad category.
4. Reveal the sources of the quotes after they have been divided up.
5. Explain the significance in knowing the source and intention of advice. Even when it sounds good, it may not come from a safe or reliable place.







✳ *Ask your students about a time when they took advice from a peer and it turned out well. There will not be many of these stories. Next, ask students to share a time in their lives when they took the advice of a peer and there were problems or repercussions that followed. Use this information and their stories to reinforce that we ought to listen to wise, godly advice from people who have lived through these sorts of situations before.*


FRAME


I. Wise Words

- A. When King Rehoboam was faced with a critical decision concerning the politics and well-being of the kingdom, he sought counsel from his friends.
 1. The people of the kingdom sought relief from the king, asking him to relax the tax and labor laws that had once been set in place.
 2. The elder advisors urged the king to listen to the people, but Rehoboam paid little attention to them, choosing instead to hear the advice of close friends with little to no experience.
- B. **The Bible tells us, “But he forsook the counsel of old men.”**  
 1. Instead he chose to listen to men he had grown up with; men with no experience or wisdom. (See I Kings 12:8, KJV) 
 2. These young men formulated a plan that went directly against the plan of the elders.
- C. Rehoboam chose to listen to young men rather than experienced elders who understood the problems at hand.
 1. It turned out to be a disastrous decision. His emissary was stoned to death, the Northern tribes of Israel rebelled, and they would no longer submit to his kingship.
 2. There may be several different reasons why Rehoboam listened to and acted upon the advice of his peers rather than listening to the wise counsel of his elders.

LESSON BIG IDEA: Listening to Wise Voices


- D. **Perhaps he listened to them on the basis of personal friendship, not expertise.**  
1. He may have felt inferior to his elders, leading him to disobey their plans as a show of power or superiority.
 2. Perhaps he even felt distant from the elders, as they were friends to his father and he held no relationship with them.
- E. Rehoboam may have felt his peers' perspective was more relevant to the times because they were younger.
1. He may have related better to the men his age and therefore saw their opinions as a way to affirm his own thinking.
 2. Even in our modern day, we take the advice of elders for granted, thinking they do not understand the culture of technology. We must be careful with this kind of thinking; wisdom is relevant, regardless of the modern culture.
- F. **He may have been trying to declare independence from his father's influence.**  
1. His decision may have been motivated by a subtle or passive rebellion. How often do you think Rehoboam heard praises for his father from those in his kingdom?
 2. It was Solomon who had built the Temple, and Solomon had been known as the wisest man to ever live. These are incredible shoes to fill, and Rehoboam may have felt threatened by his father's legacy.
 3. He may have seen this decision as a way of separating himself from his father, and as a way to create his own legacy, that he might be remembered.
- G. **He may have listened to counsel that affirmed his own opinion.**  
1. There may have been something he resented about his father's advisors.
 2. Sometimes we reject advice from individuals, not simply because we do not think it is right (oftentimes we will sense it is right), but because we are against what they represent. Sometimes younger saints will resent older saints, and older saints will resent younger saints, because each feels the other is out of touch with their generation.
- H. He may have been prejudiced against the older generation.


 *Who do you consider to be a credible person?*

 *Who do you listen to most often when making important decisions about your life?*


1. Have you ever found yourself affected by the following types of people?
 - a. Charismatic people
 - b. Manipulators
 - c. People with hidden agendas
 - d. Self-centered people
2. How much do the following spiritual attributes influence your choice of a counselor?
 - a. Humility
 - b. Integrity
 - c. Submission to God
 - d. Obeying the Word of God

II. The Widow from Zarephath


- A. Elijah was a man of God.
1. When a famine threatened the life of this woman and her son, Elijah gave her a strange order. After admitting to the prophet that she was preparing to fix her and her son's final meal, Elijah told her, "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son" (I Kings 17:13, KJV). 
 2. While we generally focus on the words of Elijah, it is also important to note the response, in faith, of the woman.
 3. By this first miracle, she established a relationship of trust with the prophet, paving the way for the second miracle in which her son was raised from the dead.
 4. Elijah operated as the mouthpiece of God to Israel, and the widow was undoubtedly familiar with his role and may have responded simply because she recognized the office that Elijah held.


 *Why do you think the widow listened to Elijah?*

 *Have you ever been asked to make a sacrifice that you did not understand in the moment?*

- B. Elijah's reputation may have preceded him.
1. When Elijah was commanded by the Lord to move to Zarephath, God had already ordained for Elijah and this widow to meet. Perhaps when she met Elijah for the first time, she recognized him as the prophet who had spoken the present famine into existence.
 2. Regardless of the reason she listened to Elijah, one thing is for sure: her heart and attitude were right. She responded not in fear or doubt, but in faith and confidence.
 3. This led her in the future to express even greater confidence in the prophet as she entrusted to him the life of her son.
- C. You need a pastor in your life.
1. God knows you are so busy tending to the responsibilities of life that you often do not hear God speaking to you, and you are not focused on the spiritual program of the church as a whole.
 2. His plan is that your pastor would become the conduit through which the wisdom and Word of God flows to you.
 - a. Your pastor seeks out the will of God and encourages the spiritual well-being for both you and the congregation.
 - b. He holds himself apart from carnal pursuits like money, possessions, and fleshly pleasures, so he can remain sensitive to the voice of God.
 3. As Paul told Timothy, "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (I Timothy 6:11–12, KJV). 




 *What are some things we should pray about concerning our pastor?*


 *What are some ways, other than prayer, that we can support and assist our pastor?*

 *Come up with a plan, with your class, to show appreciation to your pastor and his family. This will help put words into action and build a foundation of appreciation and support for spiritual leadership. It is important to discuss these things, while taking action, not only to develop good habits within your students, but also to practically show support where it is due.*

LESSON BIG IDEA: Listening to Wise Voices

III. Establishing the Right Relationships

- A. It is imperative that you establish relationships that will not only strengthen you, but also strengthen your relationship with God.
 - 1. People tend to stick close to those they closely resemble in activity and lifestyle.
 - 2. The Bible says, “Evil communications corrupt good manners” (I Corinthians 15:33, KJV). 
 - 3. A person who does not necessarily think or act in evil ways can grow to become evil simply by the company he or she keeps.
- B. A pure mind and heart can be corrupted by associating with people who have evil hearts.  
 - 1. This means a person's life is not merely a function of his or her own internal thought processes.
 - 2. We often make huge decisions, not by intellectual musing, education, or thoughtful analysis, but by the innate desire we possess to conform to our group. Moreover, this pressure can be exerted upon us by even one significant person in our lives.
- C. Relationships are critical to the quality of our lives.
 - 1. When we enter into new relationships, whether it be a friendship or a dating experience, we would be wise to evaluate our relationships to determine the effect they have on us.
 - 2. It is highly improbable that smokers, alcoholics, drug users, gamblers, and criminals simply woke up one day and decided to partake of their vice or lifestyle. Undoubtedly, someone or some group led them into their behavior.

 *Who fights peer pressure more, adults or teens?*

 *How can we effectively fight bad peer pressure while applying our own “brand” of good peer pressure?*

- D. Fishing Nets
 - 1. Nets are constructed by tying many pieces of twine or rope together.
 - 2. If a fish is caught in the net, the entire net feels the pulling pressure, even though the fish actually touches a small part of it.
 - 3. Each knot represents a person and the lengths of rope between the knots represents the relationships between people.
 - a. Whatever happens to others in the network pulls on each individual person to some degree.
 - b. Their experiences, opinions, ideas, and problems, both positive and negative, cause those connected to them to shift positions.
 - c. Those closest to them may feel extreme stress on their lives.
 - 4. This scenario helps us frame a strategy to bring sense to our universe of relationships.
- E. Each relationship you enter will change you in some way.
 - 1. Your relationships will either bring out your passions, inflame your anger, or create a sense of nobility and goodness within you.
 - 2. If the relationship becomes especially meaningful, you may engage in radical kinds of behavior that you would never have contemplated otherwise.
 - 3. You may give away everything you have, you may move to some distant point on the planet, you may turn your back on your achievements, you may sacrifice cherished possessions, you may become an essentially different person, all because of the profound impact one person makes on your life.
 - 4. These are all very extreme examples, but that does not make them any less likely or unusual. That is why it is so important that we guard our hearts and continually measure our relationships to determine if they are truly beneficial or harmful to us.

FINISH

In her monumental best seller, *Team of Rivals*, Doris Kearns Goodwin reveals that the success of President Abraham Lincoln revolved around his ingenious choice of cabinet members. Each of the men he selected to be his closest advisors were actually his early opponents in the race for the presidency.

One reviewer commented, “[Lincoln] is the more interesting to study because, unlike most presidents, who have sought to surround themselves in their cabinets with safe men who think like they do on important matters, Lincoln chose to build a cabinet out of men whose relationship to the president was problematic, if not downright risky. In 1861, Lincoln persuaded three of his rivals for the Republican nomination—Seward, Chase, and Banks—to sit on his cabinet.

“They owed Lincoln nothing. As a rule, they saw Lincoln as a man of low ability and little promise. They felt he was president by the accident of geography. Furthermore, some were enemies who would barely talk to each other. Yet, the cabinet did not dissolve in warfare. Instead Lincoln established firm control over executive decisions, much to the surprise of Seward in particular, who had assumed that he, and not the president, would lead this group and be the true decision maker in Washington. In short while, Seward and Banks became firm allies of Lincoln; indeed, Seward became Lincoln’s fastest friend in the Washington power ranks.” –David Keymer, *Vine Voice* SELAH

- ⚙️ *Do you have any relationships that you feel are very beneficial to you? Why are these relationships so special?*
- ⚙️ *Do you have any relationships that you feel are not beneficial and that you can let go?*

Middle-School Finish:

1. Discuss the kinds of friends you had when you were very young, and what kinds of things you did together. Allow students to share their experiences.
2. Now imagine that same friend, at that age, giving you advice about what you should do, where you should go, and what you should eat.
3. Because he or she is a small child, that advice might be candy for dinner or finger-painting the walls, which are not the best ideas.
4. Explain how this is similar to when we listen to peers over listening to God. Most of the time, they do not truly understand what is best for us.

Senior-High Finish:

1. Discuss a time when following a friend’s advice or direction turned out badly for you.
2. Have your students share their experiences.
3. Discuss if there was a leader who had also given advice, but it was ignored.
4. How did this change the way you or your students think? Will it change whether they listen to that friend in the future? Why or why not?

The Big Picture

Our relationships can have incredible impacts upon our lives, both physically and spiritually.

God cares about these relationships, and it is important that we determine early on which ones will be beneficial and which will be harmful.

Final Reflections **P**

- Why is it so important that we carefully create and build relationships?
- Why is it important to reassess these relationships every once in a while?
- Why should we involve God in these relationships and let Him have the final say on whether or not we should continue or end these relationships?
- What are some things to look for in solid and beneficial relationships?

LESSON BIG IDEA: Listening to Wise Voices

✦ *Allow students time to share what they've written.*

SELAH

Using the following points, take this time to guide your students in prayer.

- Jesus, we thank You for Your immeasurable wisdom and knowledge.
- So often we feel like we know what is best for ourselves, so we take our own advice and the advice of friends.
- Lord, forgive us for our unwillingness to listen to You when we are weak.
- Thank You for Your grace and patience that You show us every day.
- Teach us to follow after You and to listen to Your instruction through Your Word and through Your appointed leaders, so we will make better decisions and follow after You.

✦ *Allow time for students to update their Personal Discipleship Guide.*

ADULT

Hard Choices

A series by J. Mark Jordan



SERIES BIG IDEA

Because life is filled with hard choices, we must rely upon the wisdom found in God's Word.

Lesson 2.1

The Voices You Listen To

Lesson 2.2

Habits of the Heart

Lesson 2.3

Vision

Lesson 2.4

Values



Hard Choices:

The Voices You Listen To

A series by J. Mark Jordan

Lesson Big Idea: When facing life's inevitable, tough decisions, listen to wise voices.

Foundation

Scripture Focus: I Kings 17:10-16

Tell the story of Sir Isaac Newton on page 44.

Frame

» What do you think it means to have your heart “password protected”?

A. When King Rehoboam was faced with a critical decision concerning the politics of his realm, he sought counsel from his advisors.

1. The Bible tells us, “But he forsook the counsel of the **old men**.”

» I Kings 12:8

2. Rehoboam listened to the young men rather than the elders.

» *Why do you think Rehoboam listened to his peers instead of his elders?*

» *What is the possible danger of taking peer advice over elder advice?*

3. Perhaps he listened to them on the basis of personal **friendship**, not expertise.

4. Rehoboam may have felt their perspective was more relevant to the times because they were younger.

5. He may have been trying to declare **independence** from his father's influence.

6. He may have listened to counsel that **affirmed** his own opinion.

7. He may have been prejudiced against the older generation.

» *Why do you consider some voices to be more credible than others?*

» *Who or what are the biggest influences in your life when it comes to making big decisions?*

B. The story of the **widow** of Zarephath.

» I Kings 17:13

» *Why do you think the widow of Zarephath listened to Elijah?*

1. Elijah was a man of God.

2. Elijah's reputation may have preceded him.

» I Timothy 6:11-12

» *What are some things we should pray about concerning our pastor?*

C. It is imperative that you establish relationships that will uplift and strengthen you in the Lord.


» I Corinthians 15:33

1. A pure mind and heart can be **corrupted** by associating with people who have evil hearts.
2. Relationships are critical to the quality of our lives.
 - » *Who fights peer pressure more, adults or teens? Why?*
3. Nets

Finish

Tell the story of President Abraham Lincoln on page 48.

Foundation

Scripture Focus: I Kings 17:10-16 

Sir Isaac Newton, the renowned scientist of the 1600s, observed an apple falling from a tree one day. His inquisitive mind began to wonder why. The conventional wisdom of the day was that the apple was propelled toward the ground by gravity, a mysterious stand-alone force that had to be accepted as it was. Newton would not accept this simple explanation. Instead, he reasoned that every cause had a related effect. Therefore, some force must have caused the action, and that force was most likely the result of a relationship between the apple and the earth.

This led Newton to theorize that the gravitational force of the earth pulls everything toward the ground. He determined that a universal attraction affects all masses of matter through the force of gravity. We now call this the theory of universal gravitation. Going further, Newton posited that not only does the earth propel the apple toward it by the force of gravity, but the apple also pulls the earth toward it by that same force; that force being a coefficient of the mass of the object. In other words, the greater the mass of an object, the greater the gravitational force it exerts.

There is not a person nor an object in our universe, whether great or small, whose existence is unaffected by gravity.

In the same way, every person in your circle of family, friends, and acquaintances affects you. Conversely, you also have an effect on every other person in your universe. This creates an enormous and complex network of interdependent people, all of them connected to each other in some way, whether directly or indirectly. The things we hear, see, and feel in other people in our network exert either a positive or negative force on us.




Frame

Most people keep their hearts “password protected.” The few people who learn the password are those we allow to speak into our lives. They are most likely the people with whom we have close, credible relationships. Few of us, however, understand why relationships have such a powerful impact on us.



 **What do you think it means to have your heart “password protected”?**

If you find another person to be admirable, attractive, or engaging, you have a strong propensity to emulate his or her traits. If, on the other hand, you find a person to be despicable, repulsive, or uninteresting, you will probably try to demonstrate the opposite of his or her traits. The complexity begins, however, when these traits cannot be clearly defined. For example, what happens when someone you find attractive has questionable character? Or, what happens when someone you have always disliked turns out to be one of sterling integrity? The voices we allow to speak into our lives need to be thoroughly vetted.

When King Rehoboam was faced with a critical decision concerning the politics of his realm, he sought counsel from his advisors. First, turning to the elder advisors (those who had advised his father, Solomon), Rehoboam asked their advice regarding a request that had been made by several in the kingdom. The people were asking the king to relax his labor and tax demands that had been imposed by his father years before. The elders advised him to go ahead and meet the reasonable demands of his subjects because this would no doubt solidify their loyalty to him.



It appears that Rehoboam did not consider their advice for long. **The Bible tells us, “But he forsook the counsel of the old men,**   which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him” (1 Kings 12:8, KJV). 

The young men, whom he had grown up with, were also in advisory positions. As they listened to the king’s dilemma, they formulated advice that went directly against the advice of Rehoboam’s elders. Finding their advice much more appealing, **Rehoboam listened to the young men rather than the elders.** It turned out to be a disastrous decision. His emissary was stoned to death, the Northern tribes of Israel rebelled, and they would no longer submit to his kingship.

-  **Why do you think Rehoboam listened to his peers instead of his elders?**
-  **What is the possible danger of taking peer advice over elder advice?**

There may be several different reasons why Rehoboam listened to and acted upon the advice of his peers rather than listening to the wise counsel of his elders.

Possible Reason #1



Perhaps he listened to them on the basis of personal friendship, not expertise.   He may have felt inferior to them even though he had power over them, or he may not have wanted to disappoint them. It is often easy to discount the opinion of someone to whom you have no loyalty or personal connection. Quite possibly Rehoboam had already become distant from his elders and had put more effort into the relationships he had built with his lifelong friends.

It is important for us to build relationships with those who can speak into our lives with a voice of wisdom—those who have experience beyond the scope of what we have experienced.

Possible Reason #2



Rehoboam may have felt their perspective was more relevant to the times because they were younger. One mistake we often make is equating age with relevance. Yes, in our day and age, many feel the younger the individual, the more in touch they are with technological advances, present-day lingo, and the pulse of the masses. This may be the case in some instances. However, relevance is relative. When you are in need of advice for something you are struggling to figure out, don’t always turn to someone who thinks just like you.

Possible Reason #3

He may have been trying to declare independence from his father’s influence.   It may have been motivated by a subtle or passive rebellion. How often do you think Rehoboam heard praises for his father from those in his kingdom? It was Solomon who had built a beautiful temple to the Lord. It was Solomon who had been known as the wisest person to ever live. It was Solomon who enjoyed such peace and prosperity during his reign.

Maybe Rehoboam felt he would never measure up to his father’s reputation. Or maybe he felt he needed to establish his own legacy and decided the best way to do that would be to step out of his father’s shadow. Rejecting the advice from the men who had surrounded his father may have been a necessary move in the mind of Rehoboam.

Possible Reason #4

He may have listened to counsel that affirmed his own opinion.   Perhaps he had already determined what he would do and chose those who agreed with him. Too often this is how we approach advice we are seeking. We struggle inside to justify the decision we are wanting to make, as something within tells us it may not be the wisest. So, instead of finding voices who will agree with our hesitation, we search for voices that will encourage our justification.

LESSON BIG IDEA: When facing life's inevitable, tough decisions, listen to wise voices.

Possible Reason #5

He may have been prejudiced against the older generation. There may have been something he resented about his father's advisors. Sometimes we reject advice from individuals, not simply because we do not think it is right (oftentimes we will sense it is right), but because we are against what they represent. Sometimes younger saints will resent older saints, and older saints will resent younger saints, because each feels the other is out of touch with their generation. Truthfully, in many ways, each is out of touch with the other's generation. However, we miss out on a lot of wisdom and insight when we push people away simple because they do not understand us.

- ⚙️ **Why do you consider some voices to be more credible than others?**
- ⚙️ **Who or what are the biggest influences in your life when it comes to making big decisions?**

Have you found yourself affected by the following types of people?

- » *Charismatic people*
- » *Manipulators*
- » *People with hidden agendas*
- » *Carnal and self-centered people*
- » *People who are codependent*

How much do spiritual attributes influence your choice of a counselor? Attributes such as:

- » *Humility*
- » *Integrity*
- » *Submission to God*
- » *Insistence on obeying the Word of God*

The story of the widow of Zarephath. ✍️ 📖

When a famine threatened the life of this woman and her son, Elijah gave her a strange order. After admitting to the prophet that she was preparing to fix her and her son's final meal, Elijah told her, "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son" (I Kings 17:13, KJV). 📖

We often focus on the words of Elijah, but it is also important to note the response of the woman to the prophet. It was not the response of coercion, but of faith. She listened to his voice, did what he requested, and it resulted in a miracle. Her barrel of meal and her cruise of oil never ran dry.


By this first miracle, she established a relationship of trust with the prophet. This relationship led to a second miracle in which her son was raised from the dead.

- ⚙️ **Why do you think the widow of Zarephath listened to Elijah?**


Elijah was a man of God. He was a prophet and one who operated as a mouthpiece of God to Israel. This widow, no doubt, was familiar with the role of a prophet and may have responded simply because she recognized the office Elijah held.



Better yet, **Elijah's reputation may have preceded him.** When Elijah was commanded by the Lord to move to Zarephath, God had already ordained for Elijah and this widow to meet. Perhaps when she met Elijah for the first time, she recognized him as the prophet who had spoken the present famine into existence. If his words carried that much power and authority with God, she thought, then maybe what he told me to do will carry the same power and authority.

Regardless of the reason she listened to Elijah, one thing is for sure: her heart and attitude were right. She responded not in fear or doubt, but in faith and confidence. This led her in the future to express even greater confidence in the prophet as she entrusted to him the life of her son.

You need a pastor in your life. God knows that you are so busy tending to the responsibilities of life that you often do not hear God speaking to you, and you are not focused on the spiritual program of the church as a whole. His plan is that your pastor would become the conduit through which the wisdom and Word of God flows to you. Your pastor seeks out the will of God and encourages the spiritual well-being for both you and the congregation. He holds himself apart from carnal pursuits like money, possessions, and fleshly pleasures so he can remain sensitive to the voice of God. As Paul told Timothy, "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (I Timothy 6:11-12, KJV). 

What are some things we should pray about concerning our pastor?

It is imperative that you establish relationships that will uplift and strengthen you in the Lord. The old saying, "birds of a feather flock together," refers to the fact that people tend to stick with those who most likely resemble themselves. The Bible says, "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (I Corinthians 15:33, KJV).  Based on the realities of social development outlined in the old saying, we can readily see the powerful truth contained in this verse of Scripture.

A person who does not think in evil ways can grow to be evil through the company he or she keeps. **A pure mind and heart can be corrupted by associating with people who have evil hearts.**   This means a person's life is not merely a function of his or her own internal thought processes. We often make huge decisions, not by intellectual musing, education, or thoughtful analysis, but by the innate desire we possess to conform to our group. Moreover, this pressure can be exerted upon us by even one significant person in our lives.

Relationships are critical to the quality of our lives. Enter into new relationships with the utmost care. We are wise to evaluate our present relationships to determine the effect they have on us.

For example, would you have hired on at your current job if someone had not "talked you into it" or at least spoken favorably about it? Would you have chosen your educational major, your career, or your profession, if you had not interacted with others who made the same choices or who encouraged you to do what you are doing? Do you regret some choices you made in life because a person—who you later discovered did not have your best interests in mind—influenced you?

It is highly improbable that smokers, alcoholics, drug users, gamblers, and criminals simply woke up one day and decided to partake of their vice or lifestyle. Undoubtedly, they were led into their behavior by someone or some group.

Who fights peer pressure more, adults or teens? Why?

LESSON BIG IDEA: When facing life's inevitable, tough decisions, listen to wise voices.

Nets are constructed by tying many pieces of twine or rope together. If a fish is caught in the net, the entire net feels the pulling pressure, even though the fish actually touches a small part of it. Each knot represents a person and the lengths of rope between the knots represents the relationships between people. Whatever happens to others in the network pulls on each individual person to some degree. Their experiences, opinions, ideas, and problems, both positive and negative, cause those connected to them to shift positions. Those closest to them may feel extreme stress on their lives. This scenario helps us frame a strategy to bring sense to our universe of relationships.

Each relationship into which you enter will change you in some way. Your close association with an individual may intensify your passions, inflame your anger, or inspire you to nobility. If the relationship becomes especially meaningful, you may engage in radical kinds of behavior that you would never have contemplated otherwise. People have been known to kill over relationships. You may give away everything you have, you may move to some distant point on the planet, you may turn your back on your achievements, you may sacrifice cherished possessions, you may become an essentially different person, all because of the profound impact one person makes on your life.

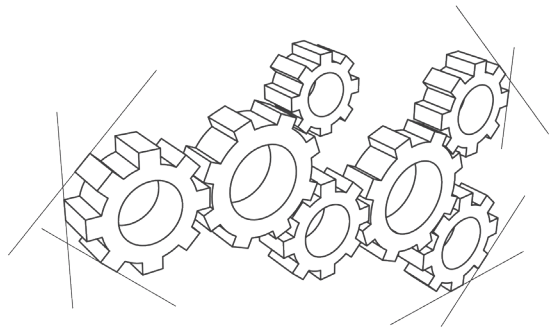
Finish

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They owed Lincoln nothing. As a rule, they saw Lincoln as a man of low ability and little promise. They felt he was president by the accident of geography. Furthermore, some were enemies who would barely talk to each other. Yet, the cabinet did not dissolve in warfare. Instead Lincoln established firm control over executive decisions, much to the surprise of Seward in particular, who had assumed that he, and not the president, would lead this group and be the true decision maker in Washington. In a short while, Seward and Banks became firm allies of Lincoln; indeed, Seward became Lincoln’s fastest friend in the Washington power ranks.” —David Keymer, *Vine Voice*

Small Group Leader's Guide



Hard Choices: *The Voices You Listen To*

Opening Question: Would you rather have a high-pitched voice when you talked but a really low voice when you sang, or a really low voice when you talked but a high-pitched voice when you sang?

Scripture Focus: 1 Kings 17:10-16

Tell the story of Sir Isaac Newton on page 44.

Group Discussion:

- What do you think it means to have your heart “password protected”? ⚙️
- What is the possible danger of taking peer advice over elder advice?
- Why do you consider some voices to be more credible than others?
- Who fights peer pressure more, adults or teens? Why? ⚙️
- How does the counsel of the ungodly differ from the counsel of the godly?
- How have you learned to hear God’s voice?
- How do you know if a voice is right or wrong?
- What does it mean to “lean not to your own understanding”? ⚙️
- How has God directed your paths at certain times of your life?
- What is the best way you have found to fight against worry and fear?
- When given a promise from God, how does faith respond? ⚙️
- Why are we blessed when we hear God’s command and obey it?
- Why is it wise to obey what God says even if you do not understand it?
- Why is it important to avoid people who are negative and critical about others and/or the church? ⚙️
- What does a godly friendship look like to you?

Prayer Focus

Lord, give me wisdom to distinguish between the right and wrong voices in my life. Guide me in the decisions I make so everything I do pleases You. When I hear the voice of Truth, help me to respond in faith. Protect and bless my pastor. I am in need of Your wisdom to help me develop pure and godly relationships.