

## A MATTER OF CHOICE

By Steve Schmutzer

[Steve's Website](#)

[Contact Steve](#)

[Steve's Article Podcast](#)

[Steve's Daniel Class Podcast](#)

I don't like heights. Standing there at the edge of the cliff with my toes extending out over the rocky lip of the precipice made me break out into a cold sweat.

I stared down into the dark chasm, unable to tear my gaze away. I couldn't see the bottom, but I already knew it was deep. The ground beneath me tipped one way and then the other. Waves of nausea washed over me, and my ears buzzed like incoming hornets.

Paralyzed at the edge - afraid to even breathe, a powerful urge to take a step forward seized me. It took extreme focus to stay put. With my senses ebbing away at the brink of this yawning abyss, and with no one around to pull me back, I wondered if I would survive this awful place.

No passer-by would have recognized my dilemma, for they would have seen me standing in the middle of my half-mowed lawn on a hot summer day!

The bright sun beat down on me as I stood there beside my broken mower. Grasshoppers rubbed their wings in a shrill chorus - and down the street, dogs howled in reply to the distant wailing of police sirens. A motorcycle roared by, and my neighbors chatted casually by the mailboxes.

I was only remotely aware of these things because the bottomless void had possessed me. I could feel the cold air wafting up from its depths, and I was mortally afraid.

I believe it was a moment in my life when God gave me a vision.

I should explain a few things here. For about eight years before this point, I had experienced a relentless onslaught of challenges. I had bit off a lot with my startup, and raising millions of dollars in a historic economic downturn was a herculean task. Progress was slow, and I was battered by those who felt sage by standing on the sidelines and stating the patently-obvious.

Several years of no income from me had made things very tough on the home front. My marriage was tested, and hurtful things were said too often. Bills went unpaid and we rarely answered the phone. My wife and I were exhausted; there was no end of this ordeal in sight. Our two children had little by the standards of their peers, and I constantly felt that I'd betrayed them.

Significant challenges also emerged in our extended family. I had become estranged from those I'd once been closest to, largely because I'd chosen to walk wiser paths. Beneath an avalanche of failed principles and unbridled pride, relationships were tragically redefined. In the aftermath, I had to be there for those that needed my support, although there was no one there for me.

Life had not been easy in the pews either. The class I'd faithfully taught for years was flourishing even as "new directions" in the church routinely came and went. I'd held to standards I felt the Word of God emphasized while others eagerly reset their sails to the latest breezes. But elaborate schemes against me by some of the leadership had bordered on obsessive, and I had a target on my back. I was called "the poster child for conflict" when I pointed out the real problems that were obvious to many.

For a long time leading up to that hot summer day, a week hardly passed that I was not rigorously tested. I had given of myself to others so much that I was running on fumes. I no longer had personal goals; my dreams had succumbed to a parade of trials I could no longer measure. I was just trying to survive, but my stamina was sputtering and discouragement was my constant companion.

My whole life had become a commitment of fiduciary duties and tortuous responsibilities to something or someone else. I found no one exercising the standards it seemed were always required of me. My shins were bloodied from choosing to walk the rocky high road, and every day I wondered if I had the strength to get out of bed and take one more step.

Unanswered questions plagued me. Had there been some fork in the road where I'd taken a wrong turn? Was I just fooling myself when I always tried to do the right thing? Was it my destiny to be an example to others of what not to become? Why did those who made the bad choices thrive? Would my family be better off without me? I had more questions like these, but good answers eluded me.

This describes my life at that juncture. I was an overburdened camel, vulnerable to one more straw. The inconvenient malfunction of my mower was all it took, and this simple event tipped my scale.

With a rush, the ominous vision came at me and surrounded me. It saturated all my senses and infused me with a strangling fear. While I was physically standing in my own yard on that hot summer day, the rest of me was transported to a most fearful place.

My perceptions had become my reality. With my heart pounding and my palms clammy, I stared down into the black jaws, wondering if I would topple in.

And then I heard the voice. I couldn't tell what direction it came from. It was just there, but it spoke to me and I was not the least bit surprised to hear it. It asked me a question, "Do you still choose me?"

Suddenly I knew why I was in this precarious place. I had an all-important choice to make. At this vulnerable crossroads of my life - when I was weakest and most afraid, when I was cynical and disillusioned, would I *still* do the right thing? Would I *still* choose God?

Sure, everyone makes honest mistakes and I'm just as sinful as the next person, but I'd consciously done my best to choose God over everything else for years up to this point. I'd exercised great efforts to stay on the narrow path.

As a result, I was unable to identify any juncture in my journey where I'd willfully gone against the plain counsel of the Word of God. Instead, under all the adversity, the Bible had come alive to me. It was the only truth I could find in my misery, and I'd often confessed that to my Heavenly Father as I poured my tears on its pages.

As I contemplated the probing question, "Do you still choose me?" I knew it was God speaking to me, but right then and there I was tapped out. Maybe others could have endured more, but MY glass was full and I was unable to take another drop. I had no more ability to fight the good fight.

I wanted to give up. Everything had become so difficult for me. It was tempting to step over the edge of that cliff and respond with "No," and the urge to do that grew with each passing second.

A monsoon of spiritual forces wrestled for my soul. I was overwhelmed by a desire to shake my fist at God. I wanted Him to hurt the way I had hurt; I wanted Him to regret the path He'd put me on. It was all so unfair - I'd done my part to be loyal to Him through thick and thin, and all I'd gotten was a raw deal. I felt no reason to say "Yes, I *still* choose you."

In that darkest of places, I became aware of a tiny spark that glimmered deep inside me, barely visible under tangled layers of fatigue and frustration. I fixed the eyes of my heart on it. As it takes effort to focus on the speck of an airplane in a blue sky, I knew I'd not find this faint light again if I looked away.

By the grace of God, that faint light glowed a bit more. I cannot explain it better than this, but as it became easier to see, those forces which had been threatening to push me over the edge of the cliff lost some momentum.

I exerted my last ounce of will and I reached for that scant gleam through a whirlwind of intimidating shadows. In that moment, I knew that choosing Jesus offered me no positive guarantees by man's standards, and it might cost me more than I'd already endured. But, my struggle at the cliff's edge had become a rational one. My sense of powerlessness had given way to a right course of action. I HAD to choose God.....*still!* This was all about my eternal standing, and I'd be a fool not to.

My spirit – the “real me” - made a firm resolution, but I spoke the words through gritted teeth, “I *still* choose you, even if you slay me. You can take everything from me, but I WILL choose you. I will die confessing your name if I have to.” It wasn't very articulate, but it was honest.

Whoosh! The terrible dark chasm disappeared just as quickly as it had come. I looked around, but it was gone. The smell of gasoline and freshly-mowed grass lingered in the hot air. I squinted in the sunlight as the grasshoppers continued their strident refrain. It was like nothing had happened.

But it had!

For the last few years, I've reflected a good deal on that watershed event. My circumstances have improved from what they were before, but I attribute those blessings to a loving God that preserves me and keeps me in the hollow of His hand. Every day I wake up knowing it's my Lord that I serve. No matter what I face, I'm here on earth to prove Him IN me.

I'd come to the very edge of my sanity on that hot summer day. I'd faced my darkest fears, but I was not without options. The Lord graciously gave me the opportunity to make a decision, and I'm thankful He provided me with the strength and faith to make the right one.

But it will be too late to choose God for “....*many on that day*” (Matt. 7:21-27). According to the prophetic Scriptures, MANY well-intentioned, highly-regarded, and devoutly-religious people will discover too late that they'd neglected to make the one choice they most needed to. Their resumes will be packed with claims of ministry and service, but the tragedy will be they never had a proper relationship with God.

If this doesn't scare you - it *should!* Multitudes of frantic people will ultimately stand before Jesus in this condition. According to this passage, they will point to their past actions, language, and achievements as evidence of their faith. Saturated with immeasurable panic, they will assert they'd already made the right choice at the right time.

However, they'll have no case. They had no relationship with Jesus – in fact, He never even knew them! Since He wasn't really their Lord, how could they really be His followers? Their problem will be they had defined their commitment to God on their terms and not His. That's a fatal mistake.

The plain truth of the Bible flies in the face of conventional Christian culture. The Scriptures bury the notion that one can utter a prescriptive prayer, then go their own way and be good-to-go for eternity. It doesn't work like that.

Furthermore, real followers of God don't find security in their denominational affiliations any more than they give high regard to their academic credentials. They are not recognized by the places they avoid, the jobs they have, and the friends they keep or the ones they don't. God is not interested in what they wear on Sunday morning, and He's not impressed with any ability to "go from zero to sixty tongues" in five seconds flat.

As the terrifying truth of Matt. 7:21-27 outlines, there are far too many "Christians" who rest in the false assurances of the things they do and say. They are no different than the Pharisees who did and said much that appeared righteous, but were exposed as "whitewashed tombs" (Matt. 23:27).

The seductive safety-in-numbers mentality persuades many "Christians" that their present situation is just fine. But God does not rely on polls, and it's accurate to say to be right with God often means to be wrong with man. The converse is equally true. It is exceedingly dangerous to assess one's spiritual condition by the measures of a church that has "*left her first love*" (Rev. 2:4).

There should be nothing more precious to any of us than a genuine saving faith, and according to the first few verses of James, that's a faith that's been rigorously tested and proved. It's one that remains unbroken after the ravages of protracted pain. A real faith is one that holds up under a gauntlet of diverse temptations and overcomes wrong choices with wisdom. All this means that true faith endures in choosing a right view of God over everything else. I'm not saying it doesn't stub its toe from time to time, but a saving faith consistently returns to a proper path.

The problem with a comfortable life is it's structured to avoid challenges, and therein lies the danger. It's when we are most comfortable that we are most unaware of our predicament. Just as a man's real character is exposed by adversity, so it's equally true that one's faith is proven in the furnace.

I maintain that one of the reasons the world will not believe the rapture has taken place when it has, is because so many "Christians" will still be found in the comfortable churches they'd always attended. Having acted like the world, these people will find themselves left in it. The circumstances of those who are left behind will be used to argue that the Bible does not really mean what it says.

I'll bring all of this to the here and now. We don't need any more teachers and preachers that will "tickle our ears" (2 Tim. 4:3) with socially-acceptable pabulum. While some people wince from the discomforts that come with hard-hitting Biblical truth, that's exactly what they most need.

Truth divides. It puts what's right on one side and it puts what's wrong on the other side. It forces us to make the important choices.

Paul exhorted us to "*...work out our salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil. 2:12) because a true faith holds immeasurable eternal value, and some discomfort to acquire it and to know it's the real deal is a good thing. As Jim Elliott said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

A time is coming when a line will be drawn between those who know Jesus and those who thought they did. It's best to examine your heart carefully now and make the right choice while you still can.

---