

# iChoose

Responsive Reading, “iChoose”<sup>1</sup>

Do you remember when you first saw a Macintosh computer? I do. It was Christmas, 1984, and we were visiting my parents in Memphis. For some reason, we happened into a store that was selling the new Mac 512k, and when that computer said “hello” to me, my world was changed forever.

Macs evolved over the years, and I’ve had several of them. In 1998, the low-end Macs underwent a radical transformation and “cutification,” and out came the first iMac. Since then, we’ve had the iPod, the iPhone, and the iPad, in several generations each, and one of the newfangled Apple twists on the iPhone has been a beautified text message called an iMessage.

These new iMessages have almost completely displaced the older ones on which I grew up, the “I-messages” that had to do with taking responsibility for one’s own emotions and responses rather than blaming things on others . . . which is much, much easier to do. Inspired by Apple’s version of “iMessages,” my sermons this summer are going to be iMessages that deal with various kinds of life issues from a faith perspective. The titles for these iMessages will be iChoose, iDoubt, iFear, iStray, iMojo, iHurt, iBoil, iRepent, iWorship, and iHope. Today, we think about choices.

You’ve probably noticed that we have lots of choices these days. As just a few examples, lattes now come in tall, short, skinny, decaf, flavored, iced, spiced, and frappe. Jeans come flared, bootlegged, skinny, cropped, straight, low-rise, bleach-rinsed, dark-washed or distressed. Movies and music can be viewed, recorded, downloaded or streamed on all manner of screens or devices; and teens can “surf,” “chat,” “tweet,” “zap” or “poke” each other in ways that their parents can barely imagine.

According to one report, the average American supermarket—and this doesn’t count Wegman’s—carries nearly 50,000 items, more than five times as many choices as were available in 1975. Britain’s Tesco superstore has ninety-one kinds of shampoo and ninety-three kinds of toothpaste. Big Box stores like Wal-Mart and Target typically carry over 100,000 kinds of things to buy.<sup>2</sup> Are you tired yet?

In an effort to reduce the number of choices you’ll face today, I’m only going to talk about three choices this morning. Each of them has a unique spelling that I hope will help you remember them. Here they are: **Ichoose**; **iChoose**; and **ichoose**. Got it? Here we go.

**Ichoose.** As you would suspect, the varying capitalization of these three is significant. The first, “Ichoose,” capitalizes the “I” but not the “choose.” The “I” is capitalized because in this instance, it refers to God and to God’s choosing.

Do you know that God knew you and chose you before the creation of the world? Well, it’s true! Listen to this: <sup>3</sup>*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* <sup>4</sup>*For **he chose us in him before the creation of the world** to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love* <sup>5</sup>*he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—* <sup>6</sup>*to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves* (Ephesians 1:3-6).

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on June 24, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> “The Tyranny of Choice,” *The Economist* (12-16-10); Sheena Iyengar, *The Art of Choosing* (Twelve, 2011).

And you may remember that Jesus told His disciples, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you*” (John 15:16).

When I was a child, I had a lot of trouble with a kind of eczema called dyshydrosis before the doctors could figure out what it was. In my case, at least, dyshydrosis was quite easy to treat once it had been properly diagnosed, but that took years and years to accomplish, and along the way, the disease frequently made it difficult for me to walk.

One result of this was that I dreaded recess during my grammar school years because I was frequently unable to play with the other children and had to sit at the side of the playground with the teachers. And even when I could walk enough to play a little bit, if teams were ever chosen for a game, I was always the very last to be chosen, because the other children knew I wouldn’t be able to help their team.

Just a few years ago, when we were back in Atlanta for Jill’s Mother’s funeral, we went back to that same playground and had a pretend marriage ceremony in which Jill undid that ancient curse by saying to me, as she does in various ways every day, “I CHOOSE YOU!”

One of most people’s deepest fears goes something like this: “If you knew me as I know myself, you wouldn’t like me.” Well, here’s some Good News. Your Father in heaven knows everything there is to know about you, including all the awful things you’ve done and the awful things others have done to you, all those ancient wounds that lie deep in your spirit to this day, and God still says to you, “I CHOOSE YOU!”<sup>3</sup>

This is the choosing that underlies all other choosing. This is the choosing that sets the direction for the universe. This is the choosing that determines the outcome of time and eternity. And it is this choosing that is the source of your limitless worth in God’s sight: God chose you in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. That’s truly awesome . . . but it’s not automatic, and that brings us to the second choosing.

**iChoose.** This second choosing capitalizes the “choose,” but not the “i,” because the focus here is not on God or on God’s choosing but on you and me and on our choosing. While the first choosing has to do with God’s establishment of our value, this second choosing has to do with our choosing to believe that what God tells us is true—that whatever God tells us is true.

It’s been about our choosing from the very beginning. Do you remember the story I told you in a *Laptop* some weeks ago about Gypsy, the dog from whom our dog got her name? That story started like this:

“Gypsy, a furry, wheat-colored collie, found herself in possession of several hundred acres of hills and woods, full of good things like rabbit trails and streams and intriguing burrows, and she delighted in it all. She was given a comfortable bed and good meals. Perhaps she rather took it all for granted. Of obligations there were few, and they not heavy. She was, to be sure, supposed to worship her Master and be right joyous to be with him. She knew she must not chase the chickens. While she must obey certain commands—to follow, to come, to lie down—there were no unreasonable ones, and no tricks. After all, to obey and to worship were natural to her dog nature.

“There came a day when, as Gypsy was prowling on the far hill past the springhouse and pasture, two things happened at once: the Master called her and a rabbit fled across the hill. Gypsy wheeled and raced towards the Master, as she had always done. Then she

<sup>3</sup> Cp. John 2:25; Hebrews 4:12-13.

stopped. It entered her mind that she didn't have to obey. Perhaps the Master didn't understand about that rabbit. Anyhow, these were her hills. The rabbit was hers, too. Very likely it was all lies—that story of everything, including herself, belonging to the Master. How did she know that the food in her dish came from him? She was a free dog, and that was the end of it. These thoughts went through her mind swiftly while she stood irresolute. Again came the Master's command; the rabbit crossed the hilltop. Gypsy whirled and raced after the rabbit. She had made a choice. She was free to choose.

"Hours later she came home. She saw the Master waiting for her, but she did not rush gladly to him, leaping and frisking, as she had always done. Something new came into her demeanor: guilt. She crept up to him like a snake on her belly. Undoubtedly she was penitent at the moment. But she had a new knowledge—the knowledge of the possibility of sin—and it was a thrill in her heart and a salty taste in her mouth. Nevertheless she was very obedient the next day and the day after. Eventually, though, there was another rabbit—and she did not even hesitate. Soon it was the mere possibility of a rabbit. And then she dropped the rabbit thing altogether and went her way."<sup>4</sup>

That is, of course, a reenactment of what Adam and Eve did in their choosing in Genesis 3, and of what you and I do in turn, not once, but many times every day. We choose, like Adam and Eve chose, either to believe that God didn't really give a particular command, so we are free to do what we want to do; or that the penalty God said would follow our disobedience won't really come, or wouldn't be so bad, and we, like Gypsy go our own way, over the hill, into the woods, and away from the Master.

Gypsy never got home again, though her master looked for her. Happily, our Great Shepherd does not give up, and He has a 100% rescue rate for those sheep who decide they want to be found. Our problem, though, is that we don't like to admit that we're lost.

Late last Friday night after Jill got home from Winchester, we drove to a not-very-nice part of Baltimore to leave her car for a trailer hitch to put on yesterday morning. Neither of us had been happy with the route our GPS had chosen to get to the U-Haul store, and we weren't happy with the route out of that neighborhood late on Friday night, either.

Finally, I said to the GPS in frustration, "*I don't care what you want me to do. I'm going to go the way I want to go!*" So I chose large, brightly-lit roads that let me move pretty quickly along. But when Jill suggested that I just turn off the GPS, I said, "I can't. I don't have any idea of where I am!"

Well, eventually one main road ran into another main road such that the GPS began to guide us in better fashion, and we did get home. God's guidance, of course, is far better than any GPS, wondrous as they may be. God's guidance is always trustworthy, and our journey under God's direction is always worth its dangers and hazards; but we have to choose to acknowledge that we really are lost without God and then choose to ask for God's help.

It's hard for most of us to get to the point of acknowledging that we're in trouble and need help beyond ourselves. Stephen Kingsley told a story that makes this point pretty well:

"In our family carpet cleaning business we offered a special service for removing pet urine odors. To show potential customers their need for the service, I would darken the room and then turn on a powerful black light. The black light caused urine crystals to glow brightly.

"To the horror of the homeowner every drop and dribble could be seen, not only on the carpet, but usually on walls, drapes, furniture, and even on lamp shades. One homeowner

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<sup>4</sup> Sheldon Van Auken, *A Severe Mercy* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1987).

begged me to shut off the light: 'I can't bear to see anymore. I don't care what it costs. Please clean it up!' Another woman said, 'I'll never be comfortable in my home again.'

"The offense was there all the time, but it was invisible until the right light exposed it. It would have been cruel to show customers the extent of their problem and then say, 'Too bad for you' and walk away. I brought the light so that they might desperately want my cleaning services.

"In the same way, God shines the light of His commandments not just to make us feel guilty and leave us that way. He has a cleaning service to offer salvation through Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>

The first time we choose to use "God's Cleaning Service," the result is what Jesus called being "born again." It is that experience of which the hymnwriter wrote, "Heav'n above is softer blue; Earth around is sweeter green. Something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen."<sup>6</sup> Paul wrote that "*if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). That first choosing—the *iChoose*—results in being born again, but there's still more.

**ichoos**. I've spelled the third choosing "ichoos" with no capitals. After God's choosing of us that establishes our value and our choosing to believe that what God tells us is True and then choosing to allow God to give us new birth, there's a third kind of choosing that goes on and on and on, a daily choosing that demonstrates the true allegiance and loyalty of our lives. It is this third choosing that God uses to give us the mind and character of Christ.

This kind of choosing is illustrated very nicely by a short meditation by Max Lucado called "The Choice." It's based on Paul's listing of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, and it goes like this:

"It's quiet. It's early. My coffee is hot. The sky is still black. The world is still asleep. The day is coming.

"In a few moments the day will arrive. It will roar down the track with the rising of the sun. The stillness of the dawn will be exchanged for the noise of the day. The calm of solitude will be replaced by the pounding pace of the human race. The refuge of the early morning will be invaded by the decisions to make and deadlines to meet. For the next 12 hours I will be exposed to the day's demands. It is now that I must make a choice. Because of Calvary, I'm free to choose. And so I choose.

**"I CHOOSE LOVE.** No occasion justifies hatred. No injustice warrants bitterness. I choose love. Today I will love God and what God loves.

**"I CHOOSE JOY.** I invite my God to be the God of circumstance. I will refuse the temptation to be cynical—the tool of the lazy thinker. I will refuse to see people as anything less than human beings created by God. I will refuse to see any problem as anything less than an opportunity to see God.

**"I CHOOSE PEACE.** I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live.

**"I CHOOSE PATIENCE.** I will overlook the inconveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite him to do so. Rather than complain that the

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Kingsley, [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com).

<sup>6</sup> George Robinson, "I Am His and He Is Mine."

wait is too long, I will thank God for a moment to pray. Instead of clenching my fist at new assignments, I will face them with joy and courage.

**“I CHOOSE KINDNESS.** I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for that is how God has treated me.

**“I CHOOSE GOODNESS.** I will go without a dollar before I will take a dishonest one. I will be overlooked before I will boast. I will confess before I will accuse. I choose goodness.

**“I CHOOSE FAITHFULNESS.** Today I will keep my promises. My creditors will not regret their trust. My associates will not question my word.

**“I CHOOSE GENTLENESS.** Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice, may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make demands, may they be only of myself.

**“I CHOOSE SELF-CONTROL.** I am a spiritual being. After this body is dead, my spirit will soar. I refuse to let what will rot rule the eternal. I will be drunk only with joy. I will be impassioned only by faith. I will be influenced only by God. I will be taught only by Christ. I choose self-control.

“Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control—to these I [choose to] commit my day.

“If I succeed I will give thanks. If I fail, I will seek His grace. Amen.”<sup>7</sup>

It’s all about the choosing. C. S. Lewis wrote that “Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself.

“To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to one state or the other.”<sup>8</sup>

So how about you? What do **you** choose . . . today?

<sup>7</sup> Max Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999). See also Tom Richards, *iChoose: Devotions for Real Life* (Minneapolis: Summerside Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperOne, 2001), pp. 86-87.

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Reader One: *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6).*

**Reader Two:** ***But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:15).***

Reader One: *Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long (Psalm 25:4-5).*

**Reader Two:** ***I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws. . . . Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart (Psalm 119:30, 34).***

Reader One: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).*

**Reader Two:** ***In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:11-12).***

Reader One: *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).*

**Reader Two:** ***But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).***

Reader One: The Word of God for the People of God.

**Reader Two:** **Thanks be to God!**