

Relationships

Premeditated Principled Decisions

Have you ever lost your car in a multi-story car park?

Yesterday Alison and I went into town for a party and parked our car in the multi-story. Knowing that we are quite capable of losing the car we checked on our way to the lift. "5" it said on the wall. "Remember that" I said to Alison, "floor 5". A couple of hours later we came back to get the car, pressed "5" on the lift and got out on the fifth floor. We walked out of the door and there, where our car had been, was a space. The space would have fitted our car perfectly but the car wasn't there.

Maybe we came in the wrong side? We wandered around. No car.

Maybe it's a funny numbering system? Alison went up one floor and I went down one floor. Sure enough, when I got down to the next floor, there was my car. I looked at the wall. "5". Weird, maybe it's a mezzanine floor thing? I went back upstairs to get Alison. "It's not up here she said, but it says "5" up there too". Puzzled we went back to the car and started down the ramp.

It was only then that it dawned on me that the "5" referred not to the floor but to the speed limit. Our attempt to plan ahead was foiled by sheer dullness of brain. This is what it is like being in our fifties.

Or have you ever driven up to a major junction and realised that you didn't know which way to go? You can't stop because you're in the middle lane, and you can't check the sat nav because there isn't time, and before you know it you're caught in a contraflow or in a one way filter and, whether you like it or not, you're on your way to Hull.

Have you ever gone out with friends for a meal and found yourself in a restaurant way more expensive than you are used to and wondering how you're going to pay your share?

If we don't plan ahead we sometimes find we lose our way. In the heat of the moment when we aren't quite prepared for what happens next, we sometimes make bad decisions and say things we regret.

And this can ruin good relationships or get us into bad relationships.

Jesus tells us that discipleship means planning ahead. You could call it the discipline of making Pre-meditated, Principled, Decisions.

- Pre-meditated – you’re thinking about it beforehand so you are not caught in the flurry of emotions and the rush of the moment.
- Principled – you’re doing what Jesus calls you to do not going with the easy, seductive option.
- Decisions – you’re making a commitment now for something in the future.

Pre-meditated Principled Decisions.

Luke 14:25-34

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.

It sounds harsh and in a way it is - but not as we think it. Jesus was a Jewish Rabbi, a teacher, and he uses a Jewish rhetorical device which is comparing and contrasting opposites. For example: Proverbs 10:1 A wise son brings joy to his father but a foolish son grief to his mother.

And the use of the word “hate” can be understood as a relative description – as in “love them less than me”. Jesus is setting up a relativity index – you must love me more than them.

27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

The cross was not a figure of speech. They would have seen people carrying crosses and would have understood and been shocked by Jesus’ application to discipleship.

And then he goes on to illustrate that if you want to follow Jesus you need to plan ahead because it is going to cost something.

28 “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?

29 For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, 30 saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

People would have resonated with this because they were aware of a huge building project going on at the time in Jerusalem - King Herod building the temple.

31 “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

Bear in mind that the Jews were a people under enemy occupation and were always revolting – or thinking of revolting - but always aware that they were out-numbered and under-equipped.

33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

On the face of it Jesus was having great success. Large crowds were travelling with him. And no wonder, he had preached with wisdom and humour, he had healed people, he had cast out demons, he was really nice to people. What's not to like!

He was about to win the popular vote on X factor.

And then he turns to them and delivers an austerity message – stop following me unless you make me more important than your friends and family! More important than yourself more important than all your material possessions and bank balance!

Jesus is telling us about the cost. He is saying something about the priority of relationships in our lives:

- With friends and family
- With our ego, our plans, ambitions, identity
- With our stuff, what we own and are

This whole change of tone from Jesus is very significant. He is redefining our relationship with him. We are no longer spectators, we are recruits. We are no longer watching from the side-lines, we're on the field of play.

We can measure the cost of following him onto the field of play by making some Pre-meditated Principled Decisions.

How do Pre-meditated Principled Decisions affect relationships?

Think of relationships as a walk along the cliff edge. Where are the places where you end up close to the edge? The cost of following Jesus is measured in the steps you take to keep a long way back from the edge of the cliff.

When you are first and foremost a follower of Jesus there are costly decisions to make about relationships.

SEX

1. When Alison and I were in a youth group together, many years ago, one of the talks we were subjected to every year was on the subject of "How far can we go?" A popular talk, that one. As you grow in intimacy with another person this becomes an

issue and it is one that is best addressed as a Pre-meditated Principled Decision because in the heat of passion you know you will lose control. So you make a Pre-meditated Principled Decision to keep sex to marriage and you agree beforehand what that means and how to ensure that it stays that way.

2. In marriage you need to ensure that you stay faithful. So you make Pre-meditated Principled Decisions about - not comparing other women/men, or about not allowing too deep a relationship to grow with someone to whom you are attracted. You are transparent with each other your diary and smartphone.
3. Pornography is wrong and destroys relationships. So decide beforehand that you won't go there - block the computer, the smartphone, the TV. If you are weak in this area have an accountability partner to whom you can go when you are struggling and who can confront you.

Sex - where is the edge of the cliff for you? Step well back.

BOOZE

By this I mean a euphemism for drugs or food of chocolate – whatever you consume to alter your state of mind.

When I get off my head I say things I shouldn't and I do things I regret. My relationships suffer. Therefore ... what?

For example I will make Pre-meditated Principled Decisions to drink X amount per week, or only ever after 7.00pm, never on my own, I won't preload, I'll go dry for a month once a year, I'll budget this amount. I'll plan my social life etc.

I'll never use drink as a way of easing a relationship or conversation.

I want my relationships to be safe and sound with no regrets.

I want to be able to talk and deal with difficult things whilst sober.

Booze - where is the edge of the cliff for you? Step well back.

MONEY

One of the main causes of relationship break-up is money. People have different ways of handling money and different values. There's the stress of too much or not enough.

As you get into a relationship with someone – at work, or romantically or just as friends – there will come a point when your biblical values of handling money may clash.

1. Generosity – giving to the church, tipping extravagantly, supporting charity;

2. Debt averse – avoiding the use of debt – credit cards, store cards, payday loans;
3. Spending less than you have coming in;
4. Saving for the future;
5. Knowing that it all belongs to God.

So make a Pre-meditated Principled Decision about how to handle the money.

Money - where is the edge of the cliff for you? Step well back.

WORK

We have many relationships at work (and I mean employment generally, whether paid or unpaid, studying, raising children):

1. With your peers – speaking well of others (decide not to gossip but to walk away when it starts), encouraging, serving.
2. With your boss/subordinates – (Colossians 6) work for your boss as if you were serving the Lord, not men/women ... and treat those who work for you in the same way the Master treats you!
3. With your customers/suppliers – honesty (saying what you do), integrity (doing what you say).
4. Leaving and arriving – leave well in order to arrive well – even if it is in difficult circumstances.

There are lots of Pre-meditated Principled Decisions to think about in your working life. Where do you find yourself compromising or behaving differently to the way you behave here or in your small group?

Work - where is the edge of the cliff for you? Step well back.

CONFLICT

Conflict can emerge in a relationship very quickly - and often over nothing very much. What principles are you going to use when dealing with conflict? Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing – but the way you handle it reflects your discipleship.

Our values statement includes one on “Collegiate Relationships” and says, “We are honoured by every person whom God adds to the Vineyard. Together we will build the Church with mutual respect, open communication, determined co-operation and believing and speaking the best about each other”.

That’s a Pre-meditated Principled Decision. And you can apply it to your secular life and your family. What decision do you need to make about how you will react to conflict –

when someone insults you or disagrees with you or when they take offence at what you've said or done or maybe when they cut you up in traffic?

The core issue is your pride. In humility it is what God thinks that really matters, not what anyone else thinks.

So, decide to always think the best about people; give them the benefit of the doubt; to count to 10 before reacting to insults. Decide to forgive first and ask questions later.

Conflict - where is the edge of the cliff for you? Step well back.

SOCIAL MEDIA

This is perhaps less of a relationship issue – more about communication with “friends”. But Social Media is an increasingly dominant way of relating with people so it behoves us to think ahead and plan carefully how we will engage with it.

Social Media - where is the edge of the cliff for you? Step well back.

SUMMARY

Where do you get close to the edge? Make active plans to step back from the edge.

Luke 14 - Where are you in this scene?

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.

Are you in the crowd – enjoying the celebrity of Jesus but actually only along for a good story and a miracle? Are you having a little of God on Sunday or at small group, a taste of eternity - whilst on Monday sticking with easy relationships, your own plans and priorities and carrying on treating all you own as yours?

Because making Pre-meditated Principled Decisions about these factors in our relationships illustrates the cost of following Jesus and putting him first.

Jesus turns in his tracks and says, “Do you really want to follow me? This is not a roundabout it's a roller-coaster. Look ahead, the journey may be arduous and risky. Don't come along if you would rather have an easy life – following me is a radical call and it will change all your relationships”.

Where are your relationship priorities?

- With friends and family

- With our ego, our plans, ambitions, identity
- With what we own and are

Look ahead, get ready, if you really want to follow Jesus and be his disciple you need to make some decisions now.

You've got some luggage there which you won't be able to carry on this roller-coaster journey. Too big, too much weight. What's in the luggage? Sexual compromise? Escape into booze? Greed and money? Ambition at work? Pride in conflict?

Jesus says, "You need to decide to drop the bags right there if you want to follow me. And you won't be able to come back for them."

CONCLUSION

Relationships are a wonderful gift to us from God. God is in relationship and that is how he created us to be. "Male and female he created them", it says in the scriptures. We were created to be in relationships – to make friends, to have the joy of doing life together.

From the beginning the enemy has tried to destroy and spoil your relationships – primarily by tempting you to put everything else before your commitment to Jesus. That's why relationships don't work as well as they should.

So we put Jesus first in our lives and we make Pre-meditated Principled Decisions about those things which are a threat to following him so that we can enjoy the truly abundant, relationship-filled life he promises on this roller-coaster ride.

Let us choose to follow Jesus and put him first so that we can have the best possible relationships with those around us.

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