

# LESSON 1: DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS



## BIG IDEA

Many factors influence decision-making.



## DESIRED RESPONSE

Students will connect the choices they make to various possible outcomes, good and bad.

### PREPARING TO TEACH:

Our students face many pressures concerning how they dress, how they talk, what music they listen to, how they think, etc. Young people spend more time in front of a computer or television than ever before, under many and varied influences. It shouldn't surprise us that they believe the messages they are seeing and hearing, because the messages are carefully calculated and crafted to target and influence this group. It also shouldn't surprise us that these worldly messages are opposed to God.

When teenagers are asked about the biggest influences in their lives, they mention parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, friends, media, and teachers. When asked whether these influential people were giving them good advice, sadly, you might hear, "Yes, but what we see them do is totally different than what they say." Ouch! Students learn not only by what is said to them, but more by what is lived out in front of them.

Whether you know it or not, you are influencing some young person. How are *you* doing? Are you living out God's word in front of him or her, or not?

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV) is a great reminder, for teachers and students:

- "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." Temptations are common to all people -- adults and children. Fulfilling selfish desires in opposition to the Word of God is as old as Eden.
- "And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." – God is actively working in us even if we are not aware of Him. God knows us intimately, what we can and cannot handle.
- "But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." We will be tempted. Once we are saved, God doesn't magically disable the TV remote, make our cars incapable of speeding, or make all irritating and annoying people disappear. Most of the time our "way out" of a temptation involves physically fleeing or turning away from something; for example, a channel on TV. We can close our eyes, we can control the remote control, we can flee, and we can unplug the TV.

Every choice has a consequence. When we see another person struggling under difficult circumstances, it may be possible for us to identify the bad choices that led to the consequences. Most of the time, good choices have good consequences, but because we live in a fallen world, we may sometimes suffer because of our good choices. In this case, God's Word says we can rejoice because we're suffering with Christ (Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13). A person may also suffer as a result of someone else's cruel, selfish, or unwise choices.



## GATHERING SUPPLIES

### Focusing Attention

- Which Chair? Arrange four empty chairs at the front of the classroom. If possible, use chairs used by people of various ages: a car seat or high chair, a child-sized chair or stool, a beanbag chair or student desk, a desk chair or rocking chair. Or use the Maturity Level poster.
- Maturity Level slideshow

### Thinking It Over

- Consequences – Bring in recent news articles about a person who has been charged with murder, particularly those in which details about the accused and a reason for the crime are known.

### Putting It into Practice

- Choices & Consequences – Make copies of *Choices.pdf* for students, with the choices on one side and the consequences on the other.

### Memo to Parents

- Prepare a take-home sheet for students asking parents to send you (by email or with the student) a photo of the student as a baby. Specify a preference for photos that don't show other family members with the child. The photos will be displayed in class during Lesson 4, and children will be asked to identify their classmates. Photo prints will be returned to parents after Lesson 4.

This lesson is designed to help young people realize they can avoid most bad consequences in their lives by making good decisions. It explores how decisions are made and gives them tools for making good decisions. We all need to choose wisely and think through our decisions.

The lesson uses the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace to illustrate good decision-making. Many other accounts in the Bible could be analyzed this way, but this one is especially appropriate because it's taken from the period when Israel was in exile. This time period has many parallels for our situation as "aliens and strangers" in this world (1 Peter 2:11). Christians need help to endure a culture that does not understand or appreciate our worldview.



## FOCUSING ATTENTION

### Which Chair?

The manner in which we make decisions in our lives has little to do with how old a person is in years, and more about whether one is wise or foolish. A person may be very old in years but make silly decisions, or very young and make wise decisions, but there does seem to be a correlation between age and wisdom.

A wise decision is one that has been carefully considered. People who are wise consider not only what the consequences of a choice will be for them, but how it will affect others.

A simple way to illustrate the decision-making process is by setting up four chairs in front of the students. The teacher may want to "act out" the characteristics of a person sitting in each chair or just describe them standing behind each one in turn. You may also use the Maturity Level poster instead of chairs to introduce the characters.

### First Chair:

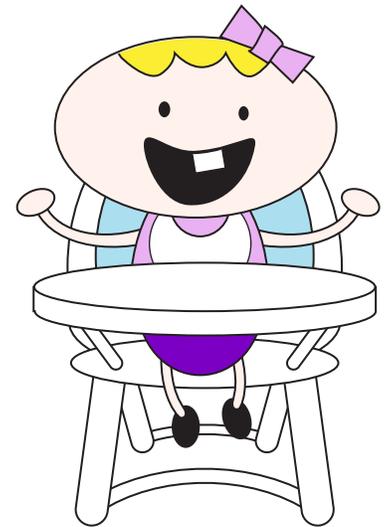
#### Introduce Me-First Maddy

Ask the students, "**What does a baby do to get what he or she wants?**" Answer: Cry. The first chair represents making decisions as a baby would. Babies think like this: "All of life revolves around me! It doesn't matter what anyone else wants. I want what I want NOW!" When you were a baby, did you care about whether your parents needed sleep or had other things to do besides hold you on their laps? No. It is expected that babies will think like this because they can't do anything for themselves and are too young to understand the needs of others. That's how Me-First Maddy thinks. Babies need parents to watch out for their needs and give them what is best, not necessarily what they want when they want it.

A mature, wise person doesn't think like this. A person who has grown beyond babyish ways of making decisions begins to recognize that other people have needs, too, and that sometimes those needs are more important than his own. Mature people notice what is happening around them and care about what is going on in other people's lives.

Sometimes, however, an older person will make a decision based only on what he wants right now. He or she can make selfish, unwise decisions just like Me-First Maddy. Immature, babyish people like Me-First Maddy don't care about others and they certainly don't care about what God's Word says. They still think, "All of life revolves around me!"

**Do you ever still make decisions the way a baby would? What are some consequences of thinking like a baby?** You might choose to do things that harm you or others. People would continue to treat you like a baby and not give you responsibility or independence. They wouldn't ask you for help or advice. They would worry that you would hurt yourself or others.



**Maddy**

## The Second Chair:

### Introduce Notice-Me Nico

The second chair represents the way children of elementary school age make decisions. Notice-Me Nico has grown to care about others and understands he isn't the only person in his family or classroom. He knows that rules are needed to make the family and classroom function, and he generally likes to follow them. He accepts that there are people in his life who are in authority over him, such as parents and teachers. He enjoys receiving praise from them when he does what they say and expects to be punished when he disobeys.

***You're in that age group. Is that description true of you? What kinds of rewards and punishments do your parents and teachers give? Stars or smiley faces on homework, etc., for good behavior and performance; negative marks or reprimands for poor performance or bad behavior. How do you feel when you get in trouble with your parents or teacher? How do you feel when you are praised? Why do parents and teachers do this? To train you to do your best.***

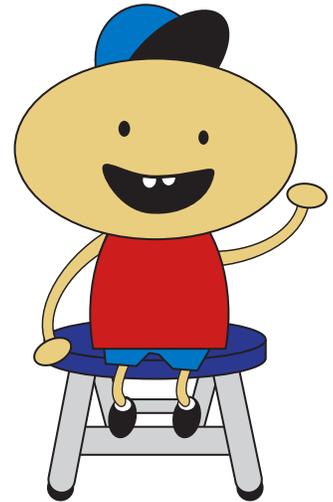
Unlike when you were in the baby stage, you and Notice-Me Nico are capable of making some decisions for yourselves. ***What kinds of decisions do your parents allow you to make? What to wear, what games to play, etc. What kinds of decisions do your parents and teachers make for you? Whether you go to school, what you will eat for dinner, and so on.***

Unless you're like Notice-Me Nico, you won't stay in the second chair for long. As you grow older, you'll be able to make even more important decisions for yourself, and there won't always be someone there to tell you what is right or wrong, to praise you for good choices (and punish you for bad ones), or even to give you advice. In order to move on to the next chair, a wise person must begin to follow his conscience – to know within himself whether he's done right or wrong. It helps to have had good parents and teachers who will train your conscience. Most of all, it helps to know God's Word so that you will know right and wrong.

If you think about it, there are few times when you are alone, without some sort of adult supervision. Someday, when you're older, there won't always be other people around to watch over you and make sure you follow the rules. ***What will happen if you don't receive praise or notice for a good deed? Will that mean it's not worth it? No. It's always good to do the right thing.*** A wise person knows that God sees and rewards you when you do right. Sometimes people get caught doing wrong and are punished, but sometimes they do not. ***Does that mean we should do whatever we can "get away" with? No. Why not?***

***What if you suffer for doing right? What then? Do you conclude that you were wrong, or do you believe that God will reward you someday? A wise person knows that God also sees everything we do. How do we learn what pleases or displeases God? From the Bible. Do you know how to find out on your own what pleases or displeases God in the Bible?***

Discuss the consequences of needing praise for our choices, for being childish like Notice-Me Nico in decision-making. A person like this might do what's right only when others are looking, but sneak around to do what's wrong in secret. She might not care to do anything unless it's rewarded or noticed in some way. Or she might do wrong just to get attention, too.



**Nico**

## The Third Chair:

### Introduce Cool Keisha

Cool Keisha, sitting in the third chair, represents the way many teenagers make decisions. Teenagers can be a lot like elementary age children, except they seek their approval from peers (friends or people they look up to) not authority figures. They also need to learn to seek rewards and approval from God.

Discussion: **Do you think Cool Keisha enjoys seeing a star at the top of her homework?** (Also mention other rewards and punishments the students mentioned in the earlier section.) **What kinds of things do teenagers hope for?** Teenagers generally are trying to be popular with or accepted by the “right” crowd. They try to say and do the things that will help them fit in. **What kinds of things might that be?** It could be smoking and drinking, having a boyfriend or girlfriend, listening to certain music groups, wearing certain clothes, wearing their hair in a certain style, etc. **Do you ever face similar pressures at your age?** **What things do people try to pressure you into doing that are wrong?** Disobey the teacher or your parents, treat another student badly, etc.

**While it’s not wrong to try to please other people and be accepted by them, what could go wrong with this way of making decisions?** You might be trying to please people who are evil or wicked. They might lead you astray from doing what is right and into doing what is wrong. They may not be concerned about what pleases or displeases God. The person making decisions like Cool Keisha may know what God wants in his or her life, but the pressures and voices of everyone else seem louder and more important. There’s nothing wrong with attempting to please others, but you should always try to please God first. Be careful not to please the wrong people for the wrong reasons and displease God.

Cool Keisha also doesn’t always think beyond what is happening right now. She might not plan for the future or consider how a decision today will affect her tomorrow. **What are some examples of decisions that affect a person’s future?** Drinking alcohol and driving a car could lead to an accident that will harm or kill you and others. It could also lead to punishment in jail because underage drinking is against the law; drinking and driving is wrong at any age.

If Cool Keisha continues to allow others to make important decisions for her, or is only concerned about pleasing other people, she will remain unwise and immature. At some point, she needs to do what’s right even if she is the only one. This type of decision can be very difficult, because other people might reject you. You may become lonely and be considered an outcast by society. **Have you ever made a decision that was unpopular with others but was the right thing to do?**



**Keisha**

## The Fourth Chair:

### Introduce Matt the Mature

God wants us to grow up and not keep thinking like babies, children, or even teenagers. 1 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV) says, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways behind me.” The fourth chair illustrates the way wise or mature adults make decisions. Matt the Mature not only seeks to please God in everything, but also thinks decisions through carefully. Sometimes the decisions are very difficult to make. As he considers what to do, he asks questions such as this:

- **How will my actions affect others?**
- **How will my behavior today influence my future?**
- **Once I’ve made this decision, will there be an opportunity to change course if things don’t go as planned?**
- **Will this harm or help me?**
- **Does this action involve sin?**
- **What might Jesus do in this situation?**

Have any of you tried making decisions this way? Are you on the way to sitting in Matt the Mature’s seat?

We tend to pity people who never grow beyond a babyish or elementary way of thinking. People who don’t mature beyond a teenage way of thinking also make many errors in judgment. Remember that people of any age may move from chair to chair. One day, a person may make a decision from the baby chair and the next from the beanbag (teen) chair. As a person grows, we expect their decision-making skills to improve and to stay in the mature chair. It helps to know what God’s Word says so we can apply it to our decision making without hesitation.



**Matt**

### MEMORIZING GOD’S WORD

*2 Corinthians 5:9a (NIV) - “We make it our goal to please him.”*

### STUDYING GOD’S WORD

To illustrate this lesson, we will look at some choices made by people in the Bible. At the same time, we’ll exercise our ability to discern the way they made their choices by deciding which chair they sat in as they made their decision.

**Scripture:** Read Daniel 3, or give a synopsis of the story. Describe the height (90 feet) and width (nine feet) of the golden statue, comparing it to a building or other structure with which the students are familiar.

Babylon was a “melting pot” of many different ethnic groups and religions. One possible reason King Nebuchadnezzar erected the huge statue (or statues) was to unite the nation and solidify his power. These statues may have been in his image. He could have been marking his territory. Wherever the people found a statue of the king, they would know this was where he ruled and that they couldn’t do whatever they pleased, but had to obey him or face punishment.

## Discussion:

Use the Maturity Level slideshow to refresh the students' memories about each of the four "chairs" or characters.

- **Which chair do you think King Nebuchadnezzar was sitting in when he decided to erect the statue and ordered all his countrymen to worship it? First, second or third chair. Why?** He was thinking only of himself, to increase his popularity and power.
- **What chair were the men sitting in who informed the king about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's refusal to bow to the statue? Second chair. What makes you think that?** They wanted to please the king and gain power for themselves.
- **What chair were "other Jews" sitting in when they decided to go along with the order to bow to the statue? First or third. They were thinking of their own safety and unwilling to stand up for God. They were trying to fit in with the crowd. Do you think they believed in and had been taught about the same God as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Yes. What went wrong?** They cared more about themselves than about God.
- Read Daniel 3:16-18. **What chair were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego sitting in?** They were sitting in the adult, mature decision-making chair because they didn't care about being popular or even staying alive. They only wanted to please God. **Do you think this was an easy or hard decision? Why?** It was difficult because everyone else went along with the king's order, and they faced the threat of a horrible death. **Where were the pressures coming from?** King, friends, others in the community. **Where do your pressures come from?** Friends, media (TV, movies, Internet, music, etc.).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted God even though they could not predict the outcome of their choices. They knew, and so did the other Jewish captives, that God did not want them bowing to any other gods. It didn't matter if they were in Israel at the time or not. God's view was clearly stated to them both by word and actions. The three had a decision to make. Based upon what they knew to be right, they stood firm -- even though others were bending their knees and even though their lives were at stake.

- **What chair are you sitting in? Do you stand up for what you know to be true from God's Word?** Here's a situation for you to think about: It's quite common for there to be one person in a classroom whom everyone teases or picks on. Without naming names, think of someone like that. **What is your response to that person? Do you go along with the crowd? If so, why? What seat is a person sitting in who goes along with the crowd? What seat is a person sitting in who abuses another person? What seat is a person sitting in who goes against the crowd to defend a person who is being abused?**

The good choice that the three young men made had a bad consequence – they were sentenced to death! They believed God could rescue them from the flames, but they could not be certain He would. Sometimes God does not rescue believers from evil consequences (think of Christians who have been or are still being martyred for their faith). What then? **How does the answer of the three young men to the king help us?**

Trusting God by obeying Him is not done only in church or on Sundays. We are faced with similar choices every day. Will we obey God with our choices or will we disobey? Only you decide. Maybe it will help you to think of these four chairs before you make a decision. Or, if you make a bad decision, you can ask yourself, "Which chair was I sitting in at the time?" or "Which of the four characters was I being like?" God wants us to trust Him that obedience is best.

## THINKING IT OVER

### Consequences:

Show the class the news articles about the murder case and summarize the details. Ask, ***“Does anyone in this class hope you’ll someday become a murderer and go to jail for the rest of your life, or face lethal injection? Why or why not?”***

Discuss what led the accused individual to become a murderer (or suspect in a murder). Perhaps he never intended to shoot anyone, but yet had made the decision to use a gun in the robbery. Perhaps he only drove the get-away car for a friend, but still he was charged as an accessory to murder. Perhaps he never wanted to kill anyone, but he chose to go along with a violent, selfish friend. Perhaps a friend threatened to harm him if he didn’t go along. ***What choices did he make that led to his participation in a serious crime? How can a person protect himself or herself from ever being in this situation? What are some better choices a person could make, such as choosing friends carefully, working instead of stealing, choosing to please God, etc.?***

Situations other than murder also reflect a similar desire for self-preservation – someone who steals to feed a drug habit, someone involved in a hit-and-run accident, etc. Relate them to situations that a junior-age young person might face, such as lying to cover up cheating on a test or the situations covered in the following activity.

## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Have students read the situations on **Choices & Consequences** (*PDF file*). Unlike the decision to murder in “Thinking It Over,” these are small choices students are likely to face in their daily lives. Have them decide what they would do in each instance and share the reasons for their choices.

Or discuss the situations using the four chairs: What would a person in the Baby Chair? What decision would a person sitting in the Adult Chair make?

Discuss possible consequences or outcomes of each choice. Flip the pages over to reveal other possible consequences.

## INTERACTIVE WEBSITE

Introduce students to the Powered by God website: *PoweredByGod.org*. They’ll get more acquainted with Maddy, Nico, Keisha, and Matthew and be able to participate in activities that go along with this lesson.

Encourage them to ask their parents for permission before accessing it.