

Sunday, February 16, 2014: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

by [Fairfax F. Fair](#) in the [February 5, 2014](#) issue

Life is Good. T-shirts broadcasting this message are available in stores everywhere in sizes for both adults and kids. I see these shirts in airports across the country. I wonder if airports are capitalizing on the hope that people who are about to be set free from regular responsibilities and stresses are inclined to join a Life Is Good club—or perhaps airports are capitalizing on those travelers whose impulse control is poor because they're excited about getting home to visit loved ones.

Life Is Good. I've heard people confess to wearing these shirts in an effort to raise their own moods, operating on the theory that if they hear something often enough they will start to believe it. Life is good—right?

Life is good, but it's our choice to recognize it, embrace it and live it as a gift and not as a hardship, as a joy and not as a trial. Life is good, but choices we make help drive it in positive directions.

A choice between life and death, between prosperity and adversity, sounds easy. It sounds like the question I asked the church staff at a recent gathering: "Anyone want to see a dessert menu?" Faced with choosing between dessert—chocolate decadence or crème brûlée—and going back to work, was there really a choice? Faced with the choice between life and death, presumably everyone would choose life. But simply stating life as our preference isn't enough. Other decisions and actions are required on our part. We also choose obedience to God or disobedience.

This passage from Deuteronomy is a portion of Moses' farewell address. Moses has led the Hebrew people through the wilderness for 40 years. He has put up with their grumbling, raged at their idolatry, pleaded with God on their behalf and brought them to the point of transition. Now his death is imminent. The Promised Land lies before them, but they must face their past failings before they can look to their future. Will the people even have a future without Moses? In God's covenant relationship with the Hebrews, it's not God's faithfulness that's in question, but the Hebrews' obedience. Will they keep their end of the deal? After all, they are prone to wander.

So are we. A later generation's spokesperson will say, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7:19).

I don't believe in a guy who has a long tail, wears a red suit and carries a pitchfork. But I believe that there is evil in the world and that we are constantly placed in situations where we must make a choice. One way may appear more attractive. Perhaps it is the path of least resistance, the approach less apt to rock the boat, the more socially acceptable way. The other way may be risky, uphill and planted with land mines. But in the paradoxical ways of God, the dangerous path may be the one that leads to life. Is our faith strong enough to follow God and stay true to God when we're tempted to fit in, to sell out, to get rich at the expense of others or to demean them with cutting remarks?

God provided for the Hebrews throughout their time in the wilderness, and God provides for us. The Hebrews did not dine on filet mignon and sleep on Tempur-Pedic mattresses, but they were sustained and cared for. We are not promised a cushy life with passes to jump to the front of the line or first-class seats, but we are promised that God will be with us through good times and bad, through heartache as well as in times of joy.

Moses is right to be concerned that the Hebrews will become entangled with allegiances to other gods—they have in the past. His call to action is not a halftime locker room speech. It is the basketball coach's talk when the last timeout has been used, three seconds remain on the clock, and the team is down by one point. There is great urgency. There is no time to learn something new: all the coach can do is reiterate lessons learned in practice and stress the need for follow-through.

Our times are radically different from those in which Moses lived, but the urgency for being attentive to God is not different. We are seduced by wealth. We prioritize our own comfort over others' needs. We put our convenience in front of urgent concerns of society and consider God's demands on us to be a lower priority than things of our own choosing.

Meanwhile God is still calling us to choose life so that we may live. Moses called heaven and earth to witness that this decision was set before the children of Abraham and Sarah. Their witness continues for us. We have a future because of God's goodness. Now the ball is in our hands.