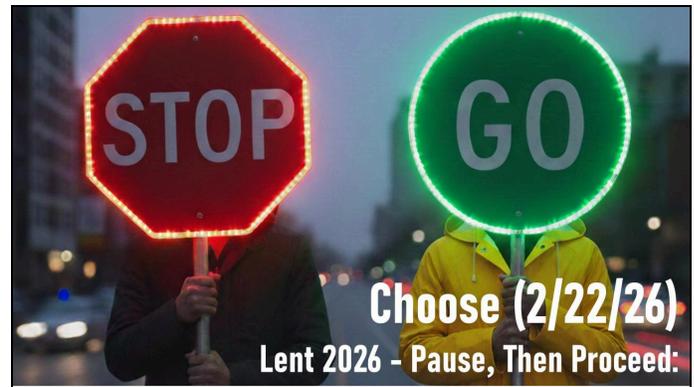


Pause, Then Proceed (Week 1) - Choose

Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. We started a new series on Sunday, 2/22, that will sync with our Lenten devotional book, "Pauses for Lent" by Trevor Hudson. Biblically, pausing is not to be confused with passivity or stasis. Instead, pausing is more like a timeout in a heated basketball game: it's a time to gather ourselves, rest a bit, reflect, plan, and then head back into the action. So our series title is "Pause, Then Proceed": each week will focus on an action that one of the daily entries in the book suggested.



2. Our first action for Lent comes from what many scholars consider the most influential, impactful passage in the entire Old Testament - [Deuteronomy chapters 28-30](#). The history books of the Old Testament simply tell us how the promise of blessing or cursing played out over Israel's history; the challenge of the prophetic books is built on the assumption that Israel's moral and spiritual choices will really matter.

3. More specifically, we explored Deut. 30.11-18. The central idea of this passage is choice: for example, here's how verse 15 reads, "Look! You must choose between the things that I (God through Moses) am offering you today. You may choose to have life and many good things. Or you may choose to have death and many troubles." 'Life' and 'death' are not merely physical; they are most holistic and existential, including moral, relational, psychological, social, and spiritual 'life/death.'

4. In [Deut. 30.11-18](#), we learn a great deal about this choosing of life or death. First, God is more attentive to our choices than we tend to be. Far more of our choices are automatic or unconscious than reflective and conscious; many are functions of our environment or habit or personal history, and not our clear-eyed awareness.

5. Also, [Deut. 30.17-18](#) insists that our choices reveal who our god or gods actually are: if we love God, we want to obey God, but when we disobey or ignore God's guidelines, we can safely assume that our chief allegiance in life has shifted to another 'god.'

6. Also, this passage wants God's people to realize that there will be sure consequences of the choices we make. They could be life-giving or life-taking consequences, but they will most assuredly happen. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote about Deut. 30 that "When God is not obeyed, a decisive break occurs in every individual life and in the life of every community and state. No one can live defiant against God without incurring the cost." In sum, who each of us is today - not to mention our church and country - is the result of choices we have made.

7. The late Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, tells us that the most remarkable facet of this crucial O.T. text is found in [verses 11-14](#). In the ancient world, the will and wishes of the gods were mysterious, hidden away from human view, save for a scant few like priests or kings. But these verses in Deuteronomy declares instead that what God wants is near to us, as close as our own hearts and mouths. As pastor Molly Baskette puts it, "God has put all the good right in front of us, like eye-level candy at the supermarket."

8. Christians often "give up" something during Lent. But in view of Deut. 30.11-18, what if we reframed or revised that historic practice? What if instead a) we stopped choosing something specific that was life-taking or destructive, and b) we were intentional to choose something specific that was life-giving?

9. Want some suggestions? [Proverbs 10.17](#) would say that the more we can move away from rejecting uncomfortable truths that we don't like and lean into learning what we need to, the more we will shift from life-taking to life-giving behavior. This would be a specific way to embrace humility that builds up ([Prov. 22.4](#)) and let go of pride that leads to ruin ([Prov. 16.18](#)).

10. Or here's another, also from Proverbs. What if you were deliberate to choose gentle speech this Lent, and avoid harsh, vicious words? [Proverbs 15.4](#) would say that too is a move away from something life-taking and toward something life-giving. And this is no surprise insofar as the power of life and death resides in the words we choose ([Prov. 18.21](#))

Choose Life This Week

- Maybe you'd like to get familiar with this most formative, influential text in Deuteronomy, one that explains so much of what the rest of the O.T. is trying to communicate?: [Deut 28-30](#)
[NRSVUE;MSG](#)
- Make a list of life-giving activities and attitudes in your life, and then also life-taking/draining ones. Which 1-2 would God like you to focus on for Lent 2026?
- Want to explore more "life-giving" behaviors in the Wisdom Literature of the O.T.? Work your way through these selections from Proverbs and discover more ways to "choose life":
[BibleGateway - Keyword Search: life](#)
- Take a deeper dive into the insight on this pivotal text from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:
[Defining Reality | Re'eh | Covenant & Conversation | The Rabbi Sacks Legacy](#) and [Why Judaism? | Nitzavim | Covenant & Conversation | The Rabbi Sacks Legacy](#)