

"Tough times don't last, but tough people do."

- Dr. Robert H. Schuller

Re-choicing for rejoicing.

You can be happy if you make the right choices in life. Your level of joy or lack of joy depends on the choices you make every day. You may find fault with others who seem to block your joy and frustrate you from being the happy person you want to be, but you are the one who makes the choice to be where you are.

Some years ago, I met a Jewish doctor while traveling on a plane from New York to Madrid, Spain. It turned out, we both were on the way to the International Psychiatric Conference. By the time we reached our destination, we'd become friends. And, in the course of our conversation, I told her that I was a minister and asked her if she believed in God. "Of course," she replied emphatically. And, I asked, "Why?" "Well," she answered, "I went through several years of medical school in Warsaw, Poland. And the one thing that was drilled into my mind was the difference between a human being and an animal. Dr. Schuller," she said, "human beings have the capacity to believe in God. No other animal has that capacity. That's the difference."

Viktor Frankl, the esteemed author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, shared an exciting concept with me that I'll never forget. He paraphrased the agonisticalist philosopher Jaspers, "To be human means we are not driven but we make decisions."

What's the difference between human beings and animals? Human beings are not driven like a herd. We can decide what flock we want to join or what group we want to be member of. We are not driven. We have a choice. That's what it means to be human.

In my book *Peace of Mind through Possibility Thinking*, I talked about one simple point. It is the courage to choose. You must have it. It takes a lot of nerve to make a decision. That's why many people are not choosers but losers. You make the decision either to be a chooser or a loser.

There are people, for instance, who have voted in political systems that deprive themselves of their freedom to fail. That form of government guarantees that they will always have food, always have a roof over their head—they have no freedom to fail—but, neither do they have the freedom to succeed.

Question: Why do people surrender their capacity to be human? Why do people choose to be losers instead of choosers? Answer: Because, when you make a choice, you are taking a chance. So, here we are: Choose to be a loser or choose to be a chooser—either one, it's up to you.

Someone recently said, "Dr. Schuller, it wouldn't be hard to make a choice if I could predict the future." My answer was simply this, "What you need is not the ability to predict the future, but what you need is faith in the unpredictable. If you have that, then you will make choices before you can be assured of the outcome."

Faith in the unpredictable. Make choices before you know what the results are going to be. Now, I challenge you: Become a chooser. Face the alternatives and then make the choices.

A person who makes a decision, even if it's a wrong one, is more of a winner than a person who cops out in his freedom to choose, surrenders to a false humility, simply becomes part of a herd—manipulated, contrived, abused, or enslaved by some ideology or system. To be human means that you are not driven. You make decisions. You can decide to be an animal or to become a human being.

Consider this question: In the holy Bible, "Don't you realize that you can choose your own master?" Romans 6:16. An apposite affirmation in Deuteronomy says, "Choose to love the Lord, your God, and cling to him for he is your life—all your days." Deuteronomy Chapter 20, verse 30.

Why are people afraid to be choosers? Why do they cop out and become losers? Because, they lack faith. Faith in God. Faith in themselves. Faith in the future.

I remember spending a memorable hour with Hubert Humphrey and his wife, Muriel, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We shared many things together—our faith in God and our thoughts of the future.

How do you take a positive attitude toward the days ahead when you know when you have an inoperable terminal cancer? How do you handle that? Faith in God.

Mr. Humphrey shared one of his favorite quotations with me that illustrated his positive faith. It was a quote from the Victor Hugo: "The future has several names. For the weak, it is 'impossible.' For the faint-hearted, it is the 'unknown.' For the thoughtful and valiant, it is 'ideal.' For the challenged, it is 'urgent.' The task is large. The time is now."

You don't need to predict the future, but you need to have faith in the unpredictable. That's why when we have a relationship with God, we dare to make choices.

Dr. Arnold Beckman, inventor, researcher, scientist, made a profound theological statement when he said to me, "God is the sum total of the unknown." Now, how do you explain man's natural inclination to curiosity? That insatiable universal human tangent called "curiosity" is God, himself, planted in human beings, keeping us moving upward, onward, outward bound—always in search for something more.

Human beings intuitively feel that so much remains undiscovered, unexplored, unknown in this universe. This unceasing call of the unknown is nature's way of keeping us unsettled, unrested, and uneasy until we make life's greatest scientific discovery: the reality that God is alive in the great unknown. So, choose to be a believer. It is really that simple. Re-choicing will lead to rejoicing! If you're not the happy person today that you want to be, why, it simply means you must make new decisions. And you could do that in whatever new situation you are in.

Some time ago, I made a hospital call on someone whom I've known for many, many years. This person was in a mental hospital with deep personal problems. When I stepped off the elevator onto the fourth floor, I noticed it was different from most floors because everything was highly secured. I started down the corridor and immediately saw my friend. She was just beginning to make a telephone call, when she looked up and saw me. "Dr. Schuller," she cried out. Then she dropped the receiver, ran to me with open arms. "It's so good to see you!" she said. She took hold of my hand, "Come on. I want you to meet my friends." She went on. First, we went into her own room where an elderly lady was resting. "Betty!" she cried out enthusiastically. "This is Dr. Schuller. He's on television every Sunday. He's my friend." The lady did not move. My friend took me then from room to room, introducing me to all of her new friends here in the mental ward of a hospital.

Well, I couldn't stay much more than 30 minutes. I stopped in the corridor and said, "Wouldn't you like to talk for a few moments alone?" She smiled and said, "But, I want you to meet the rest of my friends." So, we went into more rooms. Many of the people had only blank stares. Most of them

probably didn't hear what she was saying. But she still took my hand led me from room to room, making sure that I didn't miss anybody.

Just before I had to leave, I took her hand in mine and said, "You look so much better than the last time I saw you." "I feel better," she said.

I left that hospital knowing why she was feeling better. She had made it a point of knowing every patient on that floor and was sharing herself with them. I knew that God was using her on that particular ward to be a minister of love and faith to all the other people. She had chosen to be positive where she was. She chose to use her confinement to do something beautiful for somebody else and indirectly was being healed.

Re-choicing can lead to rejoicing any place, anytime, for anyone, anywhere. Re-choicing leads to rejoicing. It's all a matter of choosing a positive attitude toward every situation.

Some time ago, I called on a person, a person who was getting along in years. I couldn't believe what he told me. "Dr. Schuller," he said, "when you get old, like I am, you begin to tear calendar sheets off and look at what's left. It's getting thinner and thinner and thinner." I couldn't believe it. What a negative attitude! I said, "Well, don't throw the calendar sheets away! When you tear a sheet off the calendar, put it in a file and the older you get, the thicker the file gets! You begin to look with every passing year at a growing record of tremendous accomplishment for God, your family, and your fellow human beings. Every birthday will only mean that you lived longer and you've done more for God and for others." Re-choicing your attitudes will lead to rejoicing.

Yes, you can choose to take a negative attitude toward your advancing years and look at the thinness of the calendar, or you can take a positive attitude and look at the file getting thicker and thicker. Look at what a great life and a wonderful record you are rolling up. You are free, you know. You are free. Yes, you are free to choose to be negative or positive. I don't care what your situation is. I don't care. If you're unhappy, it is because you have chosen to take a mental attitude that is not positive, and that is your own fault, my friend, and nobody else's but yours.

I have taught my five children to switch dials, turn to another channel, turn the negative noise off, turn to another channel. Something is going to come bursting in with joy. You change your dial when you change your thoughts, and you change your thoughts when you change your attitudes—and, in the process, you are choosing to become the master of your own life and your own mood.

My wife and I spent some time in Australia one summer, and before we left home, I brushed up on my history, and I made this interesting discovery. Sydney, Australia, was started as a penal colony for England. The English chose to send prisoners to Australia, and when the people served their term, they were free to go. The problem was that the freed prisoners had no source of income, so they couldn't leave the colony.

Sydney was half a world away from London, yet they were dependent on England for supplies. They were a colony besieged by an ocean on one side and great mountains 40 miles to the west. And, the governor knew that this colony called Sydney, called Australia, could not possibly survive unless there was fertile land west of these mountains that could somehow be exploited. He decided to form an expedition.

Several volunteers gathered together and planned how they could cross this great mountain range.

They set out on foot. Well, they failed. Many tried—over and over—but, nobody could cross the mountains.

Finally, in 1797, Governor King declared that the mountains were unconquerable—and, that's that. He even issued a postmortem on any futile and wasteful attempt to climb the mountains.

Well, the colonists faced a bleak future—besieged by the mountains to the west, deserts and salty water around them. So, the townspeople decided to give that great mountain range a name. Guess what they called it? They called it The Barrier Mountains. Can you imagine what that negative name did to people?

Every time you give a situation a negative label, you reinforce the power of the negative forces in that situation. So, naturally, the people became convinced that the Barrier Mountains were, indeed, uncrossable. Some still had dreams that if they could climb through those hills, they might find a secret overland route to China, Asia, India, and, finally, on to Europe and freedom. Only God knows. No one has any idea how many convicts died trying to cross those Barrier Mountains.

Well, in 1813, three young, adventurous men decided they were going to try to climb over the mountains even though all other expeditions had failed. So, they studied every trip that had been made. And they determined that every single one had failed because they all crossed through the valley approach. They all failed because they took the easy way. They all followed the hollows path of the hills, but the hollows paths all led to steep cliffs.

After meeting together for some time, they wondered, “Is it really possible that everyone had failed because everyone had taken the easy way instead of the tough way? Is it possible,” they asked, “that the way to conquer the mountains is to take the ridge route?”

So confident were they, so confident that the tough way could be the winning way, that they left their expedition with more horses and supplies than they needed. People laughed and said, “Why the extra horses?” They said, “We need provisions on the other side.” They believed in success. So, these three men took the risky route, reached the crest of what we know as “Mount York,” and from Mount York they had the first colonial view of the great fertile plains of Australia. They succeeded. They saved the colony.

Re-choicing produces rejoicing. It's the tough choices that usually produce the great returns and the great rewards. Do you want courage to make good choices? Do you need the strength to make the tough choice that always seems to see the positive in every problem? Then, I suggest, you would benefit greatly if you enjoy a wonderful relationship with God. Choose to believe in success. You do make the choice. Nobody else. You make the choice when you choose your master.

Your mind is either under the mastery of people around you who are negative, or your mind is under the masterhood of somebody who is positive. If you have never met Jesus Christ, let me say something to you. He is the world's greatest possibility thinker. God decided to let the world know the truth. And, he came into this world in the form a human being called Jesus Christ.

Whatever you may believe about Jesus, this is definite: Jesus was in tune with the infinite God. He knew God as a heavenly Father. He claimed to be a very part of God. He claimed that he was the son of God. He died, and we believe, rose on Easter and is alive.

My testimony is: He lives in my mind and he lives in my heart. He gives me joy. He gives me courage to make the tough and the right decisions. Choose him to be the master of your mind. The Lord of your life. You'll be surprised. Re-choicing will bring rejoicing.

Turn your scars into stars. Many hold "a little child shall lead them." This scripture means much more to me today than it ever did before because one summer I saw how God truly turned our scars into stars.

My wife and I were in Korea, administering to 13,000 pastors, when a call came on a Saturday morning that my daughter, Carol, had been thrown from a motorcycle in the dark of night and landed in a ditch badly injured.

We tried desperately to get on an early plane. By a miracle, we succeeded. When we boarded the jet, we received another call, via satellite from the emergency room of Sioux City, Iowa. We learned that Carol's left leg had been amputated below the knee. At this point, doctors didn't know if they had to amputate further or even if she would survive.

Well, it turned out that there was a time in surgery when they failed to get a pulse beat or a blood pressure, but they kept giving her blood transfusions. The pressure came back—God saved her life. When we finally reached Carol's bedside, we had already seen dawns. The first dawning was over the Pacific, the second was over Denver, Colorado, and the third was in Sioux City, Iowa—22 hours after the accident had occurred. That's one of the marvelous things that could happen when you travel at jet speed toward the east—three dawns in a single day.

It was during the flight that we read from the Bible this verse: "My heart is quiet and confident, oh God. I will greet the dawn with a song." Psalm 57, verse 7 and 8.

No matter how you are hurting, no matter what your problem is, no matter what your pain may be—greet every new day with a song, because God is in every morning. He rides in every daybreak. And tomorrow will not be the same as yesterday. So, greet the dawning with a song.

The dawn was breaking as Mrs. Schuller and I walked in to St. Joseph's Hospital in Sioux City, Iowa. Twenty-two hours earlier, they'd picked up Carol's broken body from an Iowa ditch. Now, we stepped into the elevator—rode up to the intensive care unit. As my wife and I walked down the hospital corridor, moments away from getting the first glimpse of our wounded daughter, I saw a poster that said, "Life is what happens when you're planning something else."

Just before we reached Carol's door, I said to my wife, "I don't know if I can step into that room without bawling." Now, bawling is when you cry and make a lot of noise in the process. I bawled as we were flying across the Pacific. I felt it coming on like a sea sickness, and it could not be held back. So, I went to the lavatory to release my emotions. And, as the loud uncontrollable sounds came out, I decided to turn my problem into a possibility. I vocalized the agony-filled sounds to form the words, "Alleluia, Alleluia." Again and again, "Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia." I found healing.

If you ever hurt so much that simple wet tears turn into an uncontrollable loud cry, then give God a chance to turn the bawling into a bawl. Simply say, "Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia." My testimony is I filled with strength when I entered Carol's room. There were no tears, believe it or not.

Our 13-year-old daughter was lying there like a wounded bird in a cage with bars made out of steel.

How we wanted to hold her in our arms, but we couldn't. There was paraphernalia surrounding her.

I had rehearsed all kinds of opening lines during the plane flight and came up with a variety of openers to conversation like, "This is the day Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." It was Sunday, but I didn't feel right about it. Yet, I felt that it would be the right thing to say. So, that's what I decided to say, but I wasn't even given the chance.

When Carol saw us, she spoke the first words. "Hi, Dad and Mom." She cheerfully greeted us. "I think I know why it happened?" Before we could respond, she continued. "I have four pastors now, you know." And, she mentioned two priests who were chaplains of the hospital, then a Protestant minister who administered to her while she was in the ditch. "One, two, three, and then there's you, Dad," she exclaimed. I was glad that I was still included. Then, she explained, "I think that God has a special ministry in my life for people who've been hurt like I've been hurt."

Now, I could understand, when moments before, when we were greeted at the Sioux City airport by my oldest daughter, Sheila. She had come running up to us and said, "Dad and Mom, when you see your daughter, Carol, you'll be so proud of her."

It's not what happens to you but how you react to what happens to you that makes the difference. And, when something happens to you that's out of your control, and you feel that there's nothing you can do about it, you can still do something. You can decide what your reaction is going to be. Now, here was my 13-year-old daughter, already choosing to react creatively to something that she couldn't do anything about.

When the front line bandages were to be removed in surgery, and doctors would see how badly damaged her thigh was, they gave me a sheet of paper to sign, giving them the authority to remove the knee and the thigh up to the hip if necessary.

I have to say, it was probably the most difficult paper that I had ever signed in my life. I decided to discuss it with Carol, so I selected a time between the seizures of her pain. I shall never forget her brilliant answer. Carol said something that I wish that I had heard when I first became a pastor. I could have used that line many, many times because it is so true.

"Dad," Carol began, "I'll tell you one thing. If they take my knee or my thigh," then, she looked at me and her eyes did not flicker. Her lips did not tremble. Her face was like steel. She demonstrated that intensity of personality that you may have seen in other members of the family—stubborn intensity, I call it, just exactly the way she showed it at home plate when she played in her softball team. She finished, "If they take any more, Dad, I'll tell you one thing." She paused—waited long, stared me in the eye to make sure that I would hear and never forget what she was about to say, and she finished it. She said, "Dad, if they take my knee or my thigh, it won't change God's plan for my life one bit."

A man was selling balloons on the streets of New York City. He knew how to attract the crowd. He took a white balloon, filled it up, let it float upward. Took a red balloon, released it. Added a yellow balloon. The red, yellow, white balloons were floating over his head. Little children gathered around. A hesitant little black boy looked up at the balloons and finally said, "Hey mister. If you fill the black balloon, would it go up, too?" The man looked down and said, "Why sure. It's not the color of the balloon; it's what inside that makes it go up."

What's inside of you determines whether you achieve peak experiences in your life. Climbing to the

peak of a mountain in your life depends upon your mind and your attitudes.

I find it fascinating to read these stories, many of them legendary, of course, about the late Houdini. One of the stories is about a little town on the British Isles that decided to challenge and hopefully, I think, embarrass the great Houdini.

The town had just completed an escape-proof jail—they called it. So, they invited Houdini to come and see if he could break out. He accepted the challenge. He was allowed to enter the jail in his street clothes. People said they saw the locksmith turn the lock in some strange way, and then with a clang of steel everybody turned their back and left Houdini alone to work.

Houdini had hidden a long flexible steel rod in his belt—which is what he used to try to trip the lock. He worked for 30 minutes. He kept his ear close to the lock. Forty-five minutes, and then an hour passed, and he was perspiring. After two hours, he was exhausted. He leaned against the door, and to his amazement, it fell open. They had never locked the door! It was their trick on the great escape artist. The door was locked only in his mind. That's the only place it was locked.

Some of you think you can't climb that mountain peak. The only place where it's impossible is in your thinking. That's the only place that's locked.