

Making the Decision

When someone is clearly attracted to Christ, it's tempting to push for a decision, but most people have to travel a long road before they are ready to commit themselves to Christ. After all, they must begin to change their whole worldview, beliefs, and habits. This process can be long and disappointing, since you are dealing with people who are spiritually dead. In this session we will:



- Explore the role of the emotion, intellect, and will in the conversion process.
 - See how to recognize which of these three is at work by a person's questions.
 - Learn when to give your testimony.
 - Consider when to push for a decision and when to back off.
1. Have you ever known someone who made an emotional or intellectual commitment to Christ, but who didn't seem totally sold on it? If so, what was the person's spiritual life like?

 2. How does the parable of the soil in Mark 4:10-20 describe what happens to people with only emotional or intellectual commitment?

They receive the Word with joy or understanding, but persecution or the pressure of life make the seed unfruitful, because it lacks root in the will. Such people backslide when they fall in love with work or grow bored in their new relationship with Christ. Their faith becomes dry, an intellectual assent only with no passionate commitment to love and serve God.

3. What struck you about the way Gerry's emotions, intellect, and will interacted?

The three parts disagreed and wrestled for a long time. The resistance or positive attitude of one affected the others. The will was the longest holdout.



4. Over the course of his friendship with Gerry, how did Bill try to overcome resistance of each of these?

- **Emotions?** Bill kept involved with him long enough in order to allow him to approach his intellect.
- **Intellect?** Intellect is essential because what Gerry believed affected what he did and who he was. Bill continued to point Gerry to Jesus who is the true Gospel.
- **Will?** Bill helped Gerry understand that his faith in Christ required a commitment. He was clear that Gerry's decision was about following Christ, not just ascending to doctrine or good feelings.

Going Deeper

The Four Soils Again

In Jesus' parable of the four soils, we can see what happens when emotions, intellect, and will are not all involved in a decision.

Some people are like the path: "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path" (Matthew 13:19). These people don't even have an emotional response to the gospel. Their only hope is for God to break up the hardness in their hearts—He does it often, and it's impressive to watch. Our chief job is to pray.

"Ignorance is a serious obstacle to faith, but it is a secondary one. The real obstacle is rebellion. God wants us to put down our guns and come out with our hands up."

Jim Petersen, Living Proof

"The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or

persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away” (13:20-21). This person responds emotionally, but he does his thinking *after* making a decision. Then he has second thoughts, feels stupid for giving in to us, and avoids us. To prevent this miscarriage, we need to make sure that a person understands Christ and the commitment of faith before making a decision.

“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful” (13:22). This time the seed actually sprouts. Surely this time there’s life! But only the emotions and intellect are convinced. The will is still attached to other commitments: wealth and the worries of life. This person has succumbed to our evangelizing because he has no good reasons not to become a Christian, except that he just doesn’t want to. He’s run out of arguments, but he hasn’t really repented. There’s no faith, no love for Jesus, just mental capitulation. We need to make the issues clear for this person: a decision on these terms is not what Jesus is after.

“But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (13:23).

For Further Reading

Jim Petersen, *Living Proof*, chapters 9, 22.

Joe Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism*, chapter 11.

