

In *Choose Greatness*, Gary Chapman and Clarence Shuler look at 11 important choices every young man faces and help him choose wisely. This book is perfect for a teen to read on their own or (even better) with a mentoring adult.

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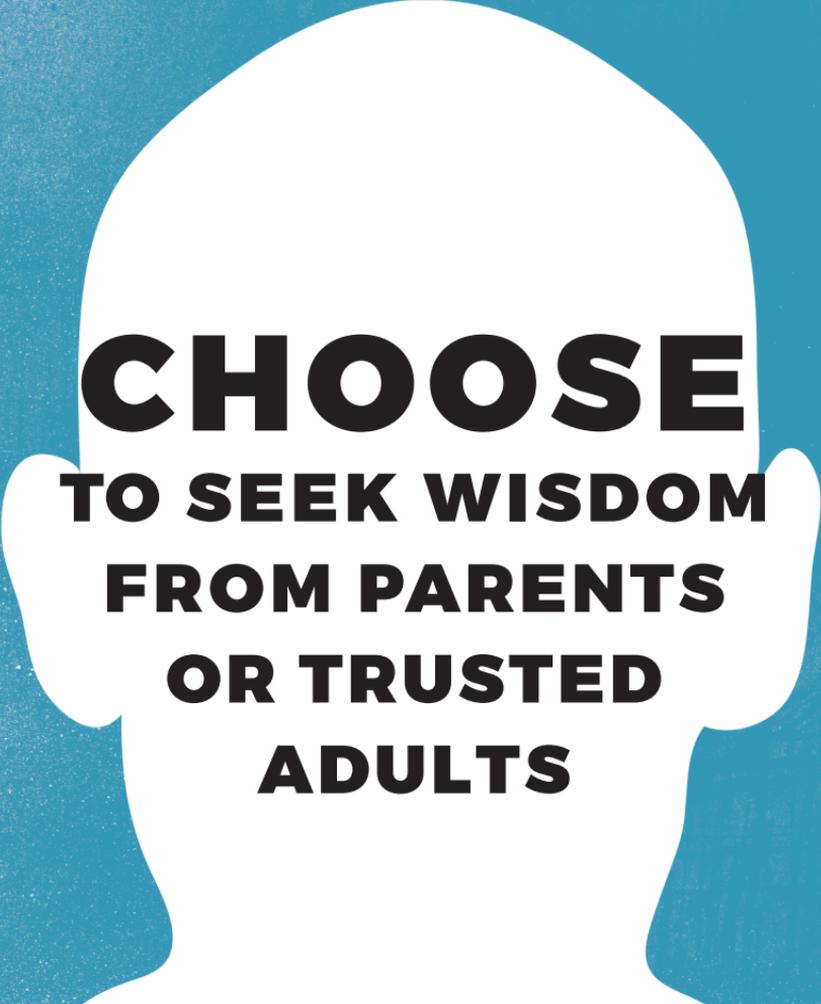
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Contents

Introduction	9
Wise Decision #1 Choose to Seek Wisdom from Parents or Trusted Adults	15
Wise Decision #2 Choose to Seek Knowledge through Education	27
Wise Decision #3 Choose to Make Technology Work for You	41
Wise Decision #4 Choose to Be Successful: Work Hard	57
Wise Decision #5 Choose to Respect Girls and Women	71
Wise Decision #6 Choose to Be Sexually Responsible	81
Wise Decision #7 Choose to Live Longer and Happier Part A: Avoid Drugs and Alcohol	101
Wise Decision #8 Choose to Live Longer and Happier Part B: Avoid Tobacco and Marijuana	113
Wise Decision #9 Choose to Build Diverse Friendships	127
Wise Decision #10 Choose to Invest Time in Helping Others	139
Wise Decision #11 Choose to Discover the Truth about God	151
Conclusion: Choose Life by Asking Good Questions	157
Acknowledgments	161
Notes	163
About the Authors	169

WISE DECISION #1



**CHOOSE
TO SEEK WISDOM
FROM PARENTS
OR TRUSTED
ADULTS**

Life was never meant to be lived alone. As young men, we need the wisdom of our fathers and mothers. Otherwise, we may make decisions based solely upon our feelings rather than upon facts. Or, we may be encouraged to make destructive decisions by evil men who seek to enslave us for their own pleasure. Thousands of young men are led down an addictive pathway by drug dealers and gang leaders who offer fun and excitement, but these promises are never based on truth. Addictions are always destructive.

In the original plan every child would have a father and a mother who would love and support each other, and parent their children with love and wisdom. When this plan is followed, children usually grow up to be responsible, caring adults who work to make the world better. Not only does this probably make instant sense to you, but also there is a ton of research that backs this up, as you will see.

Yet many children have watched their parents divorce. Even good parents who deeply love their children can't always protect them from conflict at home. Dr. William Pollock, a Harvard psychologist, discovered that when the father is no longer in the home, the son often suffers from lack of

discipline and supervision, and fails to receive a model of what it means to be a man.¹

Other children have never known their fathers because their parents never married. Thousands of children grow up in homes without fathers.² Many of these children will never know their fathers or experience what it means to be loved by them. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, young men without fathers are “twice as likely to drop out of school,” “twice as likely to end up in jail,” and four times as likely to need treatment for emotional and behavioral issues as the young men who have fathers.³

Reporting on a major study that looks at children’s life outcomes across virtually every neighborhood in this country, *New York Times* columnist David Leonhardt notes that the second most important predictor of life outcomes (after family income) is a neighborhood’s share of single-parent families. “Notably, the effect of family structure appears especially large for boys,” says Leonhardt.⁴

Children in these single-parent families are typically raised by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or sometimes foster parents. This is why we feel so strongly that every young man needs to have either a father, or a substitute father in his life. Someone has said, “Tie a boy to the right man, and he almost never goes wrong.” We want you to find the “right man.” That is why the title of this chapter is “Seek Wisdom from Parents or a Trusted Adult.”

As children, we do not choose our parents. We wish that all children could have a father and mother who love each other and are committed to loving and teaching their children. That is why, as counselors, we have invested our lives in helping couples learn how to love and support each other, and to give their children an example of what a healthy marriage looks like.

When you were a small child your father and mother, or someone who served as your parents, made decisions for you. They determined what you ate and drank. They decided what clothes you would wear. They provided the bed in which you slept. As you got older, they began to let you make some decisions. They asked questions such as, “Would you like to watch a movie or play ball?” They gave you choices between safe options. Now that you are older, your parents are not always with you. You make many decisions on your own.

The question is, will you make wise decisions? That is why we are writing this book. We want you to make wise decisions—decisions that will give you a great life. As a young man, you need the wisdom of older adults. If you need to find your way through a city you’ve only lived in a short time, it would be foolish to think you could navigate it better than if you had someone who’s lived there for years traveling alongside you. If you live with your father and mother, they can be your source of wisdom. They are not perfect, but they likely know more about life than you have yet discovered.

If you don't have a father in the home, how do you find a trusted man? We suggest that, first of all, you talk to your mother or grandmother. Perhaps they will know of someone they trust to be a positive role model for you. It may be your uncle, or your grandfather, or some other family member. The second place to find a responsible man is in the church. Many men who attend church regularly have made wise decisions in their own lives, and would be willing to help you make wise decisions in your life. Again, we suggest that you ask your mother to help you in finding a man in her family, or in the church. (A word to mothers who may be reading this: always have someone run a background check on anyone you are asking to mentor your son.) Another source is an organization called Big Brothers. This organization seeks to match responsible adult men with younger men who need a wise man in their lives.

If you read and discuss this book with your father, substitute father, or trusted adult, it will help you make wise decisions and thus give you a great life.



I (Clarence) was fortunate enough to have a dad. In my early years, my father taught me the importance of hard work and being on time. He demonstrated how essential it is for a man to provide for his family, no matter the personal sacrifice to the dad. I learned how to treat a woman by watching how my dad treated my mom. He smiled when she called him “honeybun.” He taught me commitment in

marriage because he never left my mom. Mom constantly said, “Your dad is a good man.” He must really have been because she never remarried after he died.

One of the things I remember my dad saying is, “No matter how rich or poor a man is, keeping his word tells you what kind of man he is.” Dad was a man of few words. He never said to me, “I love you, son.” I often wish I had heard those words. He seldom, if ever, commended me for my accomplishments. When I was fifteen years old I made the All-Star team at a Wake Forest University basketball camp and won a trophy for shooting the highest free-throw percentage in my age group and received a standing ovation from the other campers. Dad didn’t say anything except, “Would you like a Coca-Cola?” I complained to Mom about Dad not loving me. She explained that Dad did love me, but *his* father never told him that he loved him. She said, “It is difficult for your dad to tell you something he never heard from his father.” Mom continued, “Your father is so proud of you, but he doesn’t know how to say it to you.” Mom’s words were like music to my ears, and I received them as truth. Even so, **I later promised myself that if I ever got married and had children, I would tell them that I love them often.** I now have three daughters, and I tell them every day that I love them. Dad wasn’t perfect. Some of his habits I do not want to repeat, but I am forever grateful that he was my father. He died when I was twenty years old.

My Substitute Dad

When I was fourteen years old I met Gary Chapman. He worked as director of youth activities at a local church. My friend James and I went to a youth activity held in a gymnasium owned by the church. Gary initiated a relationship with me by coming onto the basketball court, which wasn't his comfort zone. But he wasn't coming to impress me with his basketball skills. He was coming to meet me. I began to attend the weekly youth meetings and listen to Gary teach. But what impressed me most was that he showed a personal interest in me. I felt that he genuinely cared about me and my life. He was the first person outside my immediate family who expressed personal interest in my life. I didn't know why, but I felt good having an adult male take an interest in me. I felt that I was the luckiest guy in the world because between the ages of fourteen and twenty I had two dads. After my dad died, Gary became my father figure. He's been like a father to me ever since.

Going to college required moving from North Carolina to Chicago, Illinois. Even with this tremendous distance between us, I knew I could always count on Gary. We kept in touch with each other, and he helped me with my college expenses. When I got married I asked him to be my best man. My daughters now consider him their grandfather, and he treats them as his grandchildren.

Now you know why I feel so strongly that every young man

should have a father or a trusted man in his life. **We need the wisdom of older men.**



I (Gary) was one of the fortunate ones in that I had a father and mother who were married to each other for sixty-two years. They loved each other, and they loved my sister and me. They took us to church every Sunday. They made sure that we had the opportunity to be involved in the youth activities during the week. My father not only attended church, but he sought to live by the teachings of Jesus. He believed that his role as a father was to love, support, and encourage his wife, and to love, support, and encourage his children. Beyond the family, he was active in the community, investing his time, energy, and money in the lives of other people. My dad taught me how to feed chickens, how to plant and cultivate a garden, how to mow grass, how to trim shrubs, and how to ride a bicycle.

Dad worked in a textile mill; they made towels, sheets, and pillowcases. The mill operated twenty-four hours a day. Some people went to work at 7 in the morning and finished at 3 in the afternoon. A second group of people went to work at 3 in the afternoon and finished at 11 p.m. A third group went to work at 11 p.m., working all night until 7 in the morning. My dad chose to work in the third group. He did this because he wanted to be at home every afternoon when we got out of school. So he worked all night, slept during the day, got up in the afternoon in order to be with us in the

afternoon and evening. At the time I didn't recognize what a sacrifice that was. But looking back on it, I am deeply grateful that he chose to spend time with my sister and me.

When I got married and had a son and a daughter, I was working on a church staff, first as a youth leader, and later as a counselor. I guess you would not be surprised to know that I organized my schedule so that I would be home in the afternoon when my children arrived home, and spend those hours with them each day. I wish every young man had a father as devoted as that. However, **I'm fully aware that many young men do not have such a father.** That is why Clarence and I are so strong on the idea that every young man who does not have a father at home needs a strong man in his life. Another man may not be able to spend as much time with you as a father who lives in your house, but he can teach you skills, be there to watch you play sports or music, listen to you when you need to talk to someone, and help you make wise decisions. **It is not your fault that you do not have a father living with you. But it is your responsibility to talk to your mother, grandmother, or adult with whom you live and let them help you find a trustworthy man who can share his wisdom with you.**

What We Have Learned from Our Fathers and Other Wise Men

- Always do what you say you will do.
- Recognize every individual as important and worth your time and energy.
- Remember that life is not about fame or money. It is about using your abilities to help others.
- Love people even when they fail you.
- Put God first and seek to follow the teachings of Jesus.
- Don't feel sorry for yourself.
- Never forget that you are responsible for your decisions, and you must live with the consequences.
- Always tell the truth.

These are the kinds of things that a young man learns from a loving father, or another wise man. At the end of each chapter, we are giving you a list of questions you can ask yourself, to help you better understand each decision and its effect on your life. We want to encourage you to not only ask these questions of yourself, but also of your father, substitute father, or trusted adult. Remember that life isn't meant to be lived alone!

ASK YOURSELF...

- 1. How would you describe your relationship with your dad, if you have access to him? What do you appreciate about him?**
- 2. What are some of the things you think you will do differently than your dad?**
- 3. If your dad is an absentee dad, how do you feel about him, and why?**
- 4. How would you describe your relationship with your mother?**
- 5. What are some of the things you would like to learn from your father or another man?**
- 6. What kind of father would you like to be?**

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