

oneDEGREE

determine your life course

More to Be

Have you ever stopped to consider the direction of your life?

In other words, do you know where you're heading?

Are you aware of how your decisions today are influencing your tomorrow?

Have you noticed that it only takes one step in the wrong direction (or the right direction) to totally reroute where you thought you were heading?

This is the one degree difference. And it matters in the small things and big things.

A Small Thing Isn't Really Small

Picture yourself sitting on a bench at the mall, waiting for your friend to show up. A woman walks by with a sweet-smelling caramel machiatto and your senses are heightened (okay, if you don't like coffee, pick something else that would tempt you, like Cinnabon). Suddenly, you're wondering, where is that Starbucks? I think I need one right now! So you get up, wander around the corner, and come face-to-face with the opportunity to indulge. Next thing you know, you're ordering a tall coffee, charging a drink you don't have the cash to spend, and putting 180 unnecessary calories into your body. Did you even think about what you were doing? Was it only guided by feelings and temptations?

It is such a small little decision to buy a coffee on a whim. Of course, one drink isn't going to hurt you significantly. It is only 180 calories and a few bucks. But what if you indulge every time your senses are tickled? How will that effect your bank account and calorie count over the course of a week, month, year? It is so easy to take the small things so casually, but should we?

Why the Big Things Start Small

For some of us, the big things in life are pretty easy to tackle because we've been carefully taught by our parents, church leaders, and teachers the difference between right and wrong, good and bad. But then there are other big things, like making decisions about college and a career, deciding on whether to continue in a relationship, choosing moral rights from immoral wrongs that have been culturally skewed, which present

another challenge altogether. This becomes an even greater challenge when those in authority over us are conflicted over right versus wrong, or have stumbled through their own decisions making.

Consider how you respond when a friend or family member, whom you deeply love and respect, suddenly ends up committing adultery. You might be wondering if their act is really so wrong, considering the circumstances surrounding their behavior? You might find yourself thinking, "That will never happen to me...because..." while wrestling through the effects of their poor choice on your life. Therein lies the crux of the problem.

We all have the capability to step one degree in the wrong direction.

Do you really think the decision to cheat on a mate happens suddenly? It doesn't. The big things always start small. Maybe "she" foolishly said "hi" to an old friend on Facebook a few months ago, which was followed by an email or text. Maybe "he" met up with "her" for coffee, just to talk. Maybe they couldn't stop thinking about how good it felt to be with that other person. First, an emotional affair bloomed, and then something small became something big. Could it have stopped there? Yes! But a course correction like this requires a radical response. It would have been easier to make the wise decision back when the temptation was small...back when the temptation was spurred on by a hurt or fear or feelings of neglect. Back when a small thing needed big attention.

A Course Determined By Degrees

Could it be that we have trouble handling the big things of life because we've not disciplined or trained ourselves in handling the little things?

**One decision is like one degree.
It only takes one degree in the wrong direction to get radically off course. It also takes only one degree in the right direction to get back on course.**

While we will all make mistakes and venture off in the wrong direction from time to time, it is possible to decide how we would like to respond to the small and big things ahead of time. Through understanding the cycle of temptation and

outcomes, we can train ourselves to be careful in how we live, putting our best effort toward staying on course rather than veering off by even one degree.

The oneDEGREE Course

- ➔ Temptations influence feelings.
- ➔ Feelings influence beliefs.
- ➔ Beliefs influence decisions.
- ➔ Decisions influence actions.
- ➔ Actions influence outcomes.

We can't stop temptation.

We will always be tempted by things sweet and exciting, exhilarating and off-limits, appealing and inviting. Although we can't stop temptation, we can be savvy at recognizing our weakness and running from it. We can put up boundary lines and seek accountability relationships to help us stay the course and not get off by one degree. *1 Corinthians 10:13, Luke 22:40, Mark 14:38*

We can control our emotional response.

We've been designed by God to experience all sorts of feelings -- joy, contentment, frustration, jealousy, anger, sorrow, disappointment -- but our emotional response is not meant to dictate our actions. We are expected to exert self-control, so that we do not give into temptations that will lead us astray. This takes time, practice, repentance, and accountability, as well as the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. *1 Thes. 5:6-8, 1 Peter 1:13, 5:8*

We can decide what we believe.

In the face of temptations and emotions gone wild, beliefs have to kick into high gear to stay the course. But how do we know what to believe? And how do we know what is true?

If we identify ourselves as a Christian, our baseline for truth is found in the person of Jesus Christ and the revelation of the Word of God. The Scriptures tell us in John 14:6 that Jesus Christ is the way, the Truth, and the life.

Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer of this world, died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, opening for us the gates of heaven and also enabling us to enter into a personal relationship with God.

Through faith in Christ, our life course is radically transformed, but all too often our thinking doesn't reflect the transformation. We think like that old person instead of the new one we've become. As Christians, our source of truth is the Word, yet we are easily swayed by the opinions of others, and even the culture at large. Sometimes it is hard to know what to believe. The Bible promises us that the Scriptures are useful for teaching and training (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). We can

use the Word as a guide for how we should love, serve, give, receive, grow, mature, and live wisely. *2 Corinthians 10:4-5, Romans 12:2, Colossians 1:15-23*

We can make truth-based decisions.

Every decision we make needs to come up against the truth, which is found in the Scriptures. But how do we practically do this? The Bible doesn't have Google search feature. We can't type in, "God, should I ... ?" So how do we know what God wants for us? How can we determine what is right or true when it seems there are no clear answers for our personal situation?

The answers we are looking for can be found through seeking God, reading the Bible, and listening to Christians in authority over us. As we spend time in the Word, it becomes stored up in our minds, and rather than a Google search, the Holy Spirit works inside of us, drawing out the truth we learned at another time that is relevant for our situation today. When we face these challenging situations, we can ask:

- Is this _____ consistent with the character of God?
- Is this _____ something that brings honor to God?
- Is this _____ reflective of what the Bible says is true?
- Is this _____ something that will lead me, or someone else, to sin?

When we don't know what to do, we can always approach God, the Word, and other Christians thoughtfully and humbly, in search of the truth. *Psalms 139:23-24, 2 Timothy 3:16*

We can be accountable before we act.

Sometimes, we simply won't know what God wants for us. That is why we need to come under the counsel of mature Christians, asking not only for their wisdom but also for them to teach us how to read the Scriptures. We also need to have accountability relationships with other Christians who also want to honor God and live according to the Word. These relationships ought to be pursued for the purpose of sharing honestly about what is going on in life. Confession is key to staying on course. *Colossians 3:9-10, James 5:16*

Take the oneDegree challenge

We are not meant to journey through life alone. We need to be thoughtful and intentional in how we live, which is why reading the Bible and getting in accountability relationships is so important. So, will you take the oneDEGREE challenge to encourage you to get on course and stay there? Commit for the next 31 days:

1. Pray for God to bring you an accountability partner.
2. Read one chapter of Proverbs a day and journal/pray about how your decisions are lining up with God's word.