

The Buried Talent

Or: Why God Doesn't Make Your Decisions for You

Intro: The External Word

Christian faith is based on God's Word, and so is Christian obedience. As Luther insisted so memorably, God's Word is external. We don't hear it by listening to the Spirit speaking in our hearts, for the Spirit works in our hearts to open them up to the external Word, and we never have access to the Spirit apart from the Word. So Christian faith is not based on our experience or emotion or the thoughts of our hearts, but on a Word that comes to us from outside our hearts—like the word of any real person. We don't learn who people really are by paying attention to our own experiences or our own hearts but by paying attention to *them*—to those people—and especially by listening to what they have to say. To know another person is to turn outward to the other, not inward to the self, or to the heart or its experiences. My talk today is part of my ongoing concern to foster that outward turn.

In previous lectures, I have mainly been concerned with the Word of God as the basis of our *faith*; today I want to say something about the Word of God as the basis of our *obedience*. Faith comes first, because it is through faith in God's Word that we receive Christ and thus know who God really is, and come into right relationship with him and thus learn to love him. Faith is not about *what we do*, our works, but about *what God does* for us, God's work for us and our salvation: sending his own Son to die for us, raising him from the dead for our justification, sending the Holy Spirit so that we may not be comfortless but know the truth. Faith makes all these works of God part of our life, so that he dwells in our hearts—which is why, though we are saved by faith alone, faith never remains alone: it always results in works of love and obedience. I want to focus today on obedience, because our love for God and our good works are always a response to God as another person, which means they are fundamentally a response to his Word: they consist in obedience to his commandment. God dwells in our hearts to the extent that we hear his Word and keep it, which is to say, we do not find him by turning inward to look in our hearts but by turning outward to believe and obey his Word. God dwells inside us precisely to the extent that we are looking outside us, taking hold of his external Word.

Obedience vs. Control

I'm concerned about the Biblical concept of obedience because I have noticed it is largely absent from the way we speak about the Christian life in American evangelical circles nowadays. It seems to have been replaced by all sorts of language which is supposedly about our relationship to God but which I find deeply impersonal. For instance, there's the notion that we are supposed to give control of our lives to God. That's not how the Bible talks. You won't find the word "control" in any good translation of the Bible, except sometimes as part of the word "self-control"—a word that suggests it is part of our obedience to God that we be in control of our selves! I'll talk about what appear to be the exceptions a little later—they are in fact bad translations, and it is useful

to know why. But to begin with, just think about this word, "control," and how different it is from words like "obedience" and "obey," which turn up all over the Bible. You control machines, you obey people. Control is an impersonal, mechanical relationship; obedience is a personal relationship, the way you relate to a person who is your lord, your king, your father. You obey them by obeying their word, their commandments. This should not be confused with simply complying with rules, as in a bureaucracy (like when you're signing up for classes and you have to follow the rules or the computer won't give you the classes you want). The universe is not a bureaucracy but a monarchy: God is king, and therefore we must live in obedience to him, because we find our true good in him and not in ourselves. The commandments of God are not simply a set of rules; they are God's Word. In obeying them we obey God. So obedience is a personal relationship, a relationship between persons. God does not control us like machines but gives us commandments, as a wise king and good father commands his children.

Parable of Talents vs. "Giving Control to God"

This is not a merely verbal difference. We will live differently if we think we are to obey God than if we are trying to give control of our lives to God. Consider in this light a typical Biblical picture of obedience, from which comes the title of this talk. You know the story: the parable of the talents (Matt. 25). As happens so often in our Lord's parables, the master of the house goes off and leaves his servants in charge. Make no mistake about it: these servants are his slaves, he owns them, and they owe him obedience. Yet they are in charge of the master's house. The situation is exactly the opposite of what you're trying for if you want to "give control of your life to God"! If we want to use the language of control at all, then we'd have to say that the message of this passage of Scripture is that God has given control to you, not the other way round. Obedience to the God of the Bible, in other words, is exactly the opposite of giving God control over your life: it means God has given you control over your life, which by right belongs to him. You are his possession, his slave, he *owns* you, and look what he's done: he's put you in charge of yourself, your life, all these resources and talents he has given you. He expects you to take control of your life precisely so you can be responsible for it and give him an accounting when he returns. Your job is not to give control to him, but to make wise decisions about how to use what he has put in your control.

Recall how the parable begins. The master goes away and gives his servants talents, which is a measure of weight: 5 talents (probably of silver) to one servant, 2 talents to another, 1 talent to another. So a talent, in this context, is a measure of weight but also a measure of money. The servants are supposed to do something with these talents the master has put in their control, to make something out of them. To obey him, they must be in control of what he has given them, use it wisely. The proof that *they* are in control is that he holds them accountable for what they do with the talents he's given them. They are "accountable" in that they must quite literally give an accounting, provide an account of how they have used the talents in their control, where they've invested them, how much interest they've made on them, etc. But of course this notion of giving an account is a metaphor for accountability and responsibility in general—a really illuminating metaphor, which is why our Lord often uses money as a symbol for all the things we are accountable for. We are responsible for everything God has put in our control, all our talents and resources, because we must give him an account on the last

day. We are in control, and the proof is: God will hold us accountable. We are only responsible for what is in our control: if we've been given two talents, we're not accountable for five. So there's this deep connection between accountability and control: there's no responsibility without control. If we could actually give control of our lives to God, we would not be responsible at all.

So the Biblical proof that you can't give control of your life to God is that God holds you accountable for you life. When the master returns, none of us will be in a position to say, "Lord, Lord, you can't hold me accountable for what I did with these talents! I gave them all to you! I surrendered all! I yielded my life to you! You were in control, not me!" What will the master do with so foolish and disobedient a servant? The servant who says, "Lord, I give control of it all to you" is refusing his master's commandment. It's out and out disobedience. Let me emphasize this point, which is at the heart of this talk: "Letting God be in control" is exactly the opposite of Biblical obedience. It's like calling God a liar: "No, Lord, you've got it all wrong: you didn't give me control of these talents; I gave control to you." In terms of this parable, whoever gives control to the other is the one who is master. To pretend to give control to God is to make believe you are the master. Which is to say, no one ever really gives God control of their lives, because no one is really God's master. We can only fool ourselves into thinking that's what we've done. As always, our disobedience makes us blind, for it is based on self-deception, a failure to know ourselves that follows from our failure to know the living God.

On Being Stewards

When we disobey God, we forget who we really are. We are slaves of a good master. Precisely because we are slaves, we do not give the master control over anything. How could such an idea enter our heads? The master owns the whole wealth of the world, which means only he has authority to put some of it in our control—not the other way round! We do not even belong to ourselves, for we are his slaves: even our bodies are his possession. Yet he has put them in our control, and will hold us accountable for how we use them—hold us accountable, that is, for our very selves. This business of the master putting his possessions in control of the slave is what the New Testament calls Stewardship. The kind of slaves in our Lord's parables, where the master goes off and puts his slaves in charge of the household, are stewards.

To be a steward is to be a very special kind of slave: one who is in a position of great authority, dignity and responsibility. The master has put a great deal in our control (a talent of silver is not a small amount) and he expects a great deal in return. He *honors* us with this authority, and we honor him by using it well, investing it wisely. This is not true just of Christians, but of all human beings. It is what we were created for. We were made in God's image so that we might be Stewards of the whole earth, ruling over it and subduing it, as it says right there in the very first chapter of the Bible. We are, by our very nature, Stewards, those whom God puts in control of his possessions. To give control to God is therefore to deny our very nature, to refuse to be what God has created us to be. To obey God, on the other hand, is to fulfill our nature, to come into the presence of the master and hear those wonderful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Of course the problem is that we have not actually done so well. We have made a mess of our stewardship of the earth, even of our stewardship of ourselves, our bodies and souls and communities. But that doesn't change our nature: hard as we try, we cannot escape the fact that we are made in God's image, to be his Stewards. We can try to escape who we are, of course, but that is disobedience. That is why the master is so displeased with the servant who buries his talent in the ground rather than doing something with it. It's as if the servant were saying to himself: "I'm not in control of this, not really. I'm not in control because I don't want to be. I don't want to be responsible for this talent, for I know my master is a hard man, reaping what he has not sown...." The servant who buries the talent is a steward who doesn't really want to be a steward, because he does not really believe he has a good master—he does not trust his master to be just and merciful, but a "hard man" as the parable says.

Good News vs. Bad Consequences

Paradoxically, I think this is true also of the unbiblical requirement to let God be in control of your life. Trying to give God control of our lives shows we do not want him to be master, do not trust him to be just and merciful—that we want to control him as much as possible. The paradox in fact is not hard to see: if you give control to another person, then you're the one who originally had control, which means also, you're the one who's ultimately in control in the long run. Comforting thought, if what you ultimately want is control. If you're the one giving control to the other, then you're the master. Or, to use a more mechanical image (more appropriate to the notion of "control"): if you're the one who gives control of the remote to others, then you're in control of who controls the TV. Likewise, trying to give control to God means that you're actually trying to put yourself in control, but not admitting it to yourself. The part about not admitting it to yourself is what messes you up inside, because it requires you to deceive yourself. You can only truly feel you have given full control of your life to God by getting truly good at deceiving yourself. The rest of us—those who aren't so good at deceiving ourselves—just have to feel guilty for not being spiritual enough. The horrifying thing is that so often we are taught—especially in church, of all places!—that this is what we are *supposed* to do! We are made to feel guilty, in other words, for not being good at playing this fantasy game where we succeed in manipulating God, "letting" him do all sorts of things in our life which (supposedly) he can't do unless we let him. Like every form of self-deception, this is bad for your psychological health; because it hides from you the fact that you are responsible for your own decisions, it also undermines moral responsibility and maturity; and worst of all it has the consequence of weakening your faith, because it teaches you to believe in an unreal God, one who can't do anything unless you let him.

These are all very bad consequences. So the key message I want to give you today is a piece of good news. You don't have to do it. You don't have to "let God be in control of your life." You don't have to play this game of self-deception, this game which every healthy bone in your body should be telling you is bad for you, this game which makes you secretly worry every time you play it: "am I really and truly giving control to God, or am I just pretending?" I have good news: you're just pretending! And it's a pretense you don't have to continue. The Word of God does not require it of you. Therefore God does not require it of you. I know that many of you have been told, in

sermons and Bible studies and churches, that you are supposed to let God take control of your life. But it's not so. The Bible never says that. And it does say, over and over again, that you are to obey God. So you are free to obey, free to think Biblically, free to act like a responsible adult human being, a Steward in God's house.

Now those of you who have gotten really messed up trying to "let God take control" may think this is too good to be true. The Word of God, once we understand it, is often like that: hard to believe because it's so much better than we thought, so much better than what we've been told (even at church). And I'm sure many of you have been told just the opposite of this at church, in fact. So think critically about what you hear from me. To think critically is the work of a good steward, who cannot go around investing her talents thoughtlessly. And one of the things you should be asking yourself is whether anybody has ever asked you before to think critically about this business of letting God control your life. (It's kind of suspicious if they haven't, don't you think? Notice how *guilty* you feel when you begin to think critically about it. That's a sign that some critical thinking in this area is long overdue.) Have the courage of a good and faithful steward: go ahead and think critically about what you hear, including from me.

Above all, search the scriptures and see if these things are so. How often do you see the concept of "letting God control your life" in Scripture? By contrast, how often do you see the concept of obedience? If there *is* a difference between these two concepts (as I've been arguing) then, when push comes to shove, which concept do you think is more Biblical? To put it another way: is there any doubt that the concept of obedience really *is* Biblical? If there's no doubt about that, then you are quite safe just obeying God and his commandments, and forgetting about all that other stuff about letting God take control of your life and so on. Unless the Bible is way wrong, mere obedience to God is enough. It's plenty—enough to keep you busy for a lifetime (as Martin Luther said about the ten commandments, explaining why you didn't have to be a monk or some special spiritual person to be a good Christian). You don't have to do any of that other stuff, all that stuff which everybody else says is so spiritual. Believe the Gospel of Christ, obey the Law of God: that's plenty.

A Real Lord

And here let me say one more thing about the bad consequences of this effort to put God in control of your life. It's bad for your faith, because it's practice in dealing with a make-believe God. We don't normally have to "let" real people do stuff or work in our lives. I don't have to "let" my wife love me, for instance, and that is simply because she is a real person, with a mind and heart of her own. She loves me not because I let her but because she promised, she made a wedding vow, and she is the kind of person who keeps her word. Real people are like that. They can do stuff—they even "work in our lives,"—whether we let them or not. To talk as if we have to let God work in our lives is to talk as if he were less real than anybody else we know. If my wife can love me and affect my life even when I don't want to let her, then so can God. And isn't that wonderful? I can do my best, on my grumpy and nasty days, *not* to let my wife love me, but that won't stop her, because she's already made up her mind to keep her word. And God also keeps his word, and he is no less real than my beloved.

Notice, by the way, that you would never talk about making a real person "real in my life." Nobody talks that way about anybody but God. That's what I call practicing

the unreality of God. Only an unreal God has to be "made real" in our lives by "letting him take control." A real God is doing stuff in our lives all the time, whether we let him or not—simply because he is real—and we don't control him or give him control over our lives. He's already Lord. He works in our lives whether we let him or not.

So here's some more good news. You never have to let God be Lord of your life. *Jesus Christ is Lord*, not because you let him, but because God raised him from the dead, just like Scripture says. God the Father made his beloved Son Lord over all things, including you, so he is Lord over your life whether you "let" him be Lord or not. You don't make him Lord over you life, any more than a slave makes his master Lord over his life. Now of course, he works in our lives differently if we are obedient than if we are disobedient. That's a very important difference. But it does not mean we "let" Christ be lord, any more than a slave lets his master be master. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Lord whether we obey him or not—indeed our disobedience is sinful precisely because he is our rightful Lord and remains so even when we disobey. It wouldn't be disobedience if he were only Lord when we "let" him be Lord over our lives.

No "Control" in Scripture

OK, I've promised to tell you about the passages where the notion of "control" seems to appear in Scripture. Let me mention first, the word does not appear anywhere in the old King James Bible, translated about 400 years ago, for reasons similar to why there is no real equivalent of the English word "control" in ancient Greek or Hebrew: "control" is a mechanical idea, and so you don't need such a word in your vocabulary in a world that doesn't have many machines in it. And then in the RSV translation, which is a little over 100 years old, you get the word "self-control" as a term for the virtue of temperance, suggesting, of course, that we *should* be in control of our lives... Then, when you do find the word in more recent translations of the Bible, it is usually replacing the language of personal relationship, words like "authority" and "subjection," which are about how one person relates to another, not how a person controls a machine.

The most important exception to this pattern is the especially bad translation of Romans 8 by the NIV. This is the same translation which eliminates Paul's word "flesh" and replaces it with the phrase, "sinful nature." So the NIV makes it virtually impossible to follow what Paul is saying when he contrasts flesh and Spirit. Things get even worse in Romans 8, where Paul speaks (to translate very literally) of "minding the things of the flesh and...the things of the Spirit" (8:5) as well as "the mind of the flesh...and the mind of the Spirit" (8:6) which I take to be roughly equivalent phrases. You could even translate the latter phrases using a verbal noun, like "the minding of the flesh...and the minding of the Spirit." That is to say, Paul is not talking about the Spirit's own mind, but about how we set our minds on things of the Spirit or on things of the flesh. But this is all bobbled up by the NIV, which has to throw in the word "control," giving us phrases like "the mind controlled by the Spirit." The translators seem determined to make us use the concept of control so they throw it in there when there is just no such thing in the text, not even close. So my point stands: in no good translation do you get anything like the idea of God controlling us or us giving control to God.

Making Grown-up Decisions

I wonder if one of the reasons the translators of the NIV were so intent on throwing the word "control" into Paul's text is because they didn't like his talking about our minds as if they were all that important. They seem to have thought we would be better off under mind-control, not using our own minds. Whereas Paul has no hesitation in saying we should use our minds like grown-ups. The crucial point about grown-ups—people like stewards, for example—is that they have to use their own minds, make their own decisions, unlike little children whose parents make their decisions for them. And don't let anyone try to beat you into submission by quoting that verse where Jesus says we are to become little children. He does not mean we should *think* like little children. The apostle Paul clarifies this point for us when he says, "Brethren, be not children in your thinking. Be babies in evil, but in thinking be adult." (1 Cor. 14:20). So if someone tries to club you with that one verse, hit him back with this one. To think like a child, when you are not a child, is disobedience. The master doesn't want his stewards thinking like children about the talents he gives them. And by the way, you can't go playing Paul off against Jesus, as if they contradicted each other. Paul's saying is simply a less vivid way of saying what our Lord Jesus says when he tells us, "Be wise as snakes, but harmless as doves" (Matt 10:16). I.e., be adult in your thinking, but be babes in evil.

So Biblical obedience is an activity for grown ups. It requires you to be adult in your thinking, to use your mind, to make your own decisions, for which you will be held accountable, just like the stewards in Jesus' parable. Notice again how the parable works: the stewards are under obedience, they have to invest their talents wisely. But their obedience does not mean that God is telling them what to do all the time. Quite the contrary. Their obedience consists in making the best and wisest decisions they know how. That's what I mean by saying that Biblical obedience is for grown ups. It's not as if you're a little child and God is a controlling parent telling you what to do all the time. No, God is a good father, who wants his sons and daughters to grow up, growing in wisdom as well as stature, just like his only-begotten Son.

Now, you can't grow in wisdom if you don't learn how to make adult decisions. That takes practice making your own decisions, and learning from your own mistakes. Notice, the parable never suggests that the master would punish his stewards for making an honest mistake. For sometimes you do your best to find a good investment and it still doesn't work out. Only the disobedient servant, the one who thinks his master is a hard man, is afraid of being punished for that. So he's the one who buries his talent, refusing to make his own decisions, waiting for the master to tell him what to do. Notice here how the responsibility of a steward works: to refuse to make your own decisions is disobedience. To wait for God to tell you what to do is disobedience. To "seek God's will for your life" as if God was supposed to make your decisions for you, is disobedience.

Once again, let me emphasize that this is good news. If you can't figure out what God's will is for your life, that's just fine. You're not supposed to know, and you're much better off realizing that than playing games of self-deception where you try to convince yourself that you've heard God speaking in your heart to tell you what his will for your life is. With rare exceptions, God doesn't tell people that kind of stuff. That would defeat his own purpose, which is to put you in charge of the talents he has given you and give you a chance to be a good steward, a wise steward, learning from hard experience how to make good decisions. This is one of the great secrets of God's commandments:

they look like restrictions, but in reality they are permissions. So hear the good news: You are *permitted* to make your own decisions, like an adult, because you are *commanded* to make adult decisions. God's commandment gives you permission to grow up, to become a responsible adult decision maker. Therefore God does not make decisions for you, he does not tell you what his will for your life is, precisely because he has commanded you to be a good steward of the talents that he has put under your control. Yes, that's scary, but it is also what you were made for. You were not made to be a child all your life, but to grow up in the image of God's own beloved Son, in wisdom and understanding and sound judgment.

Wisdom Discerns between Good and Bad

Let me stress that point about wisdom. A good steward is a wise steward. You cannot obey God if you are a fool, for you cannot be a good steward if you are foolish. So God himself commands you in Holy Scripture: "Get wisdom; and whatever else you get, get understanding" (Prov. 4:7). This is a central theme in the early chapters of the book of Proverbs, where a father is teaching his son, and like any good father he does not want him to remain a child or be a fool but to acquire wisdom, understanding, good judgment, the ability to discern between good and evil. Don't let anybody try to use another passage from the book of Proverbs as a club, the famous passage where the father tells his son, "Lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge the LORD, and he will direct your paths." (3:5f) We can't interpret this as if it were contradicting what he says in the very next chapter: "Get wisdom, get understanding" (4:5). Indeed, what he means seems pretty clear from the very next verse: "Be not wise in your own eyes, but fear the LORD and depart from evil" (3:7). One essential feature of wisdom is not being wise in your own eyes. (Socrates taught this lesson to the Athenians in Greece, also. You don't have to read the Bible to realize that the people who are wise in their own eyes are fools, and the people who lean on their own understanding have no understanding). Those who seek wisdom do not lean on their own understanding, trusting in their own cleverness to get away with doing evil. Rather, they follow the ways of the LORD, and depart from evil, as the Scripture says. It's the same old Biblical story about obeying God's commandments. Nothing in this verse suggests that you are supposed to "let" God make your decisions for you. How could a young man do that and still seek to get wisdom, as his father commands him? You cannot become a wise decision-maker without practice making your own decisions. What's more, you cannot be trusting the LORD if you're not seeking understanding. For refusing to seek understanding is disobedience to His explicit command—and that's not a way of trusting the LORD!

My fear is that many of you young people have no experience making decisions except by playing this fantasy game of "finding God's will for your life," where you pretend that it's God making decisions for you. So let me try to suggest what the Biblical alternative actually looks like. How does someone who seeks wisdom go about making decisions? What does the decision-making process look like?

One crucial hint can be found in the way Scripture connects wisdom with good judgment, and especially with discerning between what's good and what's bad (for example, in Solomon's prayer for wisdom, 1 Kings 3:9). This tells you about the key terms to use in decision-making or *deliberation*, as it's called—"deliberation" being the

word for our thinking about what to do. When you deliberate, instead of asking what God's will for this situation is, ask what is good and right to do in this situation. Once you've got a good answer to that question, then you know enough about what God wants you to do. And let me add, the discernment we're talking about here is not just discernment between moral good and evil, but between all kinds of good and bad which are relevant to our decision making, as when a steward tries to figure out which field to buy as a way of investing his talent, and which field is a bad investment, not a good one to buy. The Steward doesn't ask, "What is the master's will for this investment"? He already knows that: make good investments, not bad. Now it's the steward's job to learn which kinds of fields are good investments and which aren't. He must seek understanding of what makes a good investment, discerning between good investments and bad. That is God's will for his life. For it's right there in his commandments: "whatever else you get, get understanding."

Another trap to avoid is trying to decide on the basis of our motivations. Scripture does not command us to discern what is in our hearts (except for purposes of confession of sin and repentance). It's dark and messy in there, hard to see clearly, and trying to make a decision on the basis of whether you have the right motives will leave you worried and confused, because most of the time we have more than one motive for each of our actions, we have mixed motives, a whole variety of motives both good and bad. Besides, your motives are usually irrelevant to the decision at hand; they don't tell you whether this is a good field to buy, or what is the right thing to do. Let me illustrate. I once had a student come to me for advice about whether she should drop my class. The situation was something like this: she was doing well in the class, liked it, but she had overloaded, taking 6 or 7 classes that semester, and didn't think she could do justice to all of them. So she was thinking about dropping my course, the only one she didn't really need to graduate, but she was worried that she wanted to drop the class for the wrong reason. At first all I could do was listen to her worries, not knowing how to help her out of them, until it occurred to me: wait a minute, isn't all this worrying about motives irrelevant? Won't the decision in front of her be clearer if she just asks herself: "is it a good thing for me to drop this class, in light of my other commitments, etc.?" And once that question came into focus, discernment was pretty easy: it would be a bad thing to keep on taking all these classes, and my class was the one class she didn't need to graduate, so mine was the best one to drop. Her motives were irrelevant, but her worries about her motives had paralyzed her until she re-phrased her decision-making in terms of discernment of good and bad. And then her motives were no longer a problem. She just did the best thing. And notice, this is precisely how to learn to have the right motivation. For if your motivation is to do the best thing, then you've got the right motivation.

Another example: "Should I marry this person?" Don't ask God, he's not in the business of telling you. And don't look at your motives, they're way too complex. Instead, discern good and bad. Ask questions about what is good:

1. Is this a good person ?
2. Is he/she good to me?
Can I be good for him/her?
3. Can we together be good parents?

Final example: a manipulative speaker trying to get you to donate money by telling his audience to close their eyes and listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling them in

their hearts to give. I actually had this happen to me once. I decided the thing to do is open my eyes and take out a pen and paper, and start figuring out how much to give this organization—or whether I should give any money at all to an organization that used such manipulative tactics in its fundraising.

Last piece of advice: watch out for people who don't want you to think--using those verses as a club, telling you to close your eyes and just listen to the Spirit, etc. Manipulative people know what they're doing. They'll set it up so the "voice of the Spirit" is really the voice of your own guilt-feelings. And they'll set it up so that you feel guilty for even thinking that. So notice when somebody is trying to make you feel guilty for thinking critically. What reason could they have for this, other than a desire to control you? I can't think of any. So remember: you're a steward, which means God has put *you* in control of those talents, and therefore you must think critically and responsibly about how to use them. And therefore you are *allowed* to think critically, like a good and wise steward. So open your eyes, ignore the guilty feeling in your heart, which is not the voice of the Spirit, and get to work figuring out what is the best thing to do, discerning good from bad, and making a responsible adult decision.