**CHOICES**

**LAY TALK**

*20 minutes including introduction, prayer, etc.*

**Note to Speaker:**

*The objective of this Talk is to help the Participants begin to know themselves as unique human beings; to begin to see themselves as products of physical limitations, but also past free‑will choices, and to help move the Participants from thinking of themselves as victims of circumstance to considering their own involvement in the course of their lives. To let them understand that the course of their lives can and will be changed through the choices they make from here on.*

*(Note to Speaker: It will be noted that* ***at no place in this talk does the speaker mention God or even religion in general****. It is also the only talk in which the speaker does not talk about trust or about his/her reunion group.)*

PRAYER: Kairos Community Prayer, pg. 11, Freedom Guide.

***Speaker introduces self, telling name, whether lay or clergy person and giving name of talk.*** *This information should also be displayed on a poster board, flip chart sheet, or written on chalk board.*

# ORIGINS OF LIFE CHOICES

As a child, many of our choices are made for us by our parents or caregivers. We are told what to eat, what to wear, where to live, when to go to bed and when to get up.

***(Speaker talks about how it was growing up and the choices dictated for him/her)***

### EXAMPLE: *My choices were dictated by my father and his work (or lack of work) schedule. When he worked swing or graveyard shift, I had to stay home during the summer and be quiet. You know that being quiet all day long for a child is a near impossibility….which resulted in many spankings and even further restrictions.*

When we are **adolescents or teens**, we begin to make choices as an expression of our **independence** from our parents. We choose who we hang out with, typically what we wear, **how we behave at home** and at school. Sometimes we lead a double life, one for home and one for school. Most of our choices are **learned by watching others.**

***(Speaker talks about how choices might have been different and how he/she made different choices between home, school or the streets)***

### EXAMPLE: *For many years I wore two hats…one for home, that kid who never said anything for fear of reprisal from his father….one for school, that kid who never seemed to shut up in class and who was outgoing and friendly. If I dared to mix up the role the punishment was swift and sure. I hated my teen years and my father for his actions.*

When we are adults, we have more control over the choices we make. I know that it might not seem like it, but the reality is that we make choices based on past experience or belief and develop patterns that may be good for us or bad for us.

***(Speaker explains one or two incidents in his life and how that impacted him/her for a long time…maybe forever)***

### EXAMPLE: *At the age of 9, I was taught a lesson that hung with me until about 33. My father came in drunk and bloody after a bar fight and broke into the house and my room. He proceeded to put his fist through the wall over my bed and waved this bloody, sheet-rock covered hand in front of my terrorized face proclaiming that “This is good Family blood, you don’t need anyone else in life”. You know, I believed him for many years and acted just like that, no friends…not even my wife could break through that shell. I later came to understand that the statement might have been true for my father but not for me!*

**HOW CHOICES AFFECT OUR LIVES**

1. We go through life making choices guided by our past accumulation of learning and baggage.
2. How we treated life and made choices in the past will have a great effect on us throughout our life.
3. By making no choice, we’ve made a choice.

What we learn today, coupled with our past experience, can change the choices we make for the future. I have made some tough choices to get there.

***(Speaker, how did the cumulative experiences of life affect you?)***

**EXAMPLE*:*** *Based on the series of experiences with my father in my younger years, I vowed never to be like him. I would be different. The shame I have felt and hurt I have caused in my own Family when I rage like he did brings me up short when I look in the mirror and see…guess who? my Father! I know and understand what life was like for him and know and understand that I have the power to change that within myself*.

**WHAT ABOUT YOUR CHOICES IN PRISON?**

On the outside **we make around 225 choices** per day. In prison, so many choices are made for us that the number drops down to **25** per day: When to go to your house, when to shower, what and when to eat, what to wear, what work assignment, when to make a phone call… the list goes on and on. You do have choices about how to do your time. What kind of person do you want to be in here? I am sure you will recognize some of these ways:

1. **The Loner**, stays in his/her house and rarely mixes with others. He/she goes to work, canteen or chow and back to the house. A loner is at risk…Others may perceive that you are weak or a little crazy. The loner may get flak on the line as others try to take advantage of him/her.
2. **The Gang Member**. We all have the need to belong or be accepted by others. In some institutions, the pressure to join is tremendous. This kind of person may be asked to do something that is worse than what got him/her in prison in the first place.
3. **One may be a connection** for others, runs drugs, arranges sex…who knows what. Sometimes he/she may hang with others who have chosen that route to pick up the crumbs of power and canteen that come along.
4. **There’s the hardhead,** someone who keeps running into walls with other inmates and or staff…he/she never seems to learn how to get along. This is another rough road because everyone around you is on guard at all times.
5. **A Negative Leader.** This road is usually a no win situation; the choices one made on the street got him/her here and now he/she is doing it again. Hard time for those actions is generally the result of making this mistake again.
6. **Finally, there’s the independent**, someone who does their time their way. This could be you; you are open to change and ways to get by without hassle. You **don’t make any big statements** that will cause you grief. When you do make a change in your life, be ready for the other inmates to test you. They will **chase you all** over the yard to get you to break your word. This is a path that may have a lot of risk, and a lot of reward. It is easy to be a follower…and very difficult to choose to make your own way.

#  WHAT DO YOU DO ABOUT CHOICES?

**A choice can be a response to life, not just a reaction.** Maybe up to now you have reacted to every event in your life based on what you learned. To take control of life, change needs to take place…move from reacting to events to responding to those same events. A reaction is an emotional reflex; a response is a considered action. **It takes a lot of practice for one to make that important change. Write this down:**

**EVENT + REACTION = WHAT YOU GET!**

##### (Give an example of a reaction to a situation and how that impacted you)

##### Let me give you an example. When our son turned one, we put him in a diaper, put him on a sheet on the ground and gave him a cake to attack! My father was present and went nuts, cursing and gesturing how wasteful this was and how crazy we were. I reacted just like him and told him to leave and do not come back!! As it would turn out, my father died 6 months later and we never spoke in between. I received a phone call early in the morning before he died, with someone on the line who would not speak. I look back today and like to think that that was my dad…trying to settle the space between us…trying to say the words he never said: “I love you!”

##### Through looking at the way I reacted to him, I have changed my patterns from the past.

Only when **we look at our lives in retrospect** do we see the big picture…how the choices in the past have been a reaction to the conditions around us for the moment. Moving out of the immediate need and seeing what **effect our choices caused** can give new perspective. What if you looked forward into the future to consider the effect of your choices? How would that affect the decisions you make today? Economically? Environmentally? Socially? **Make** **choices in your life that respond** to events with consideration of and an eye to the future. **Write this down:**

**EVENT + RESPONSE = WHAT YOU WANT!**

***(Give an event in your life that could have harmed you and your Family if you had not responded the way you did…if you never responded and always reacted…say so. Now looking back what could you have done differently?)***

**Example: *In 1992, I had another opportunity to respond rather than react.*** *Our daughter called us in the night with the call that chills my heart. She had been raped after a party in college. My wife and I flew to LA and saw our baby frozen, cold, emotionless. She would not talk to us and told us to just go home. The young man was someone on campus that she had never met. We returned home angry and sad at the same time. After getting home, my first reaction, was to load up the guns and go to southern California to take care of business…reason got the better of me…I had been volunteering in prison for a number of years and recognized that the prisons were full of both sides of the fence I was about to cross, both rapists and murderers. If I had done what my reaction called for, I would have gone to prison…not as a volunteer. It took me nearly six months to return to the prison as a volunteer. My* ***response has kept me available*** *both to my daughter and to my Family.*

**THE OUTCOME WILL BE DIFFERENT**

1. **In order to make significant kinds of change**, to make different, better choices and meet life with a response rather than a reaction, we need to think about ourselves: **who we are, how we feel, who and what are** **important to us**, **the choices we have made and where they have taken us and whether we wish to change some of that. We also need to think about the choices we will make in the future and the direction we wish our lives to go.**

Our choices will determine the outcome of our life.

Please bow your heads for two minutes of silent meditation. *(Speaker walks away.)*