

Lucia Lloyd's sermon
 Proper 10, Year A
 Genesis 25:19-34

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What do you do when you have a tough decision to make? One of my favorite things to do in those situations is to use the 10-10-10 rule, which has helped me find clarity every single time I've used it. It comes from a book by Suzy Welch called 10-10-10. It is actually surprisingly simple. She explains,

"Here's how it works. Every time I find myself in a situation where there appears to be no solution that will make everyone happy, I ask myself three questions:

What are the consequences of my decision in 10 minutes?

In 10 months?

And in 10 years?"

That's it.

When you're deciding between option A and option B, you ask yourself, how will I feel about having chosen option A 10 minutes from now? How will I feel about having chosen option A 10 months from now? How will I feel about having chosen option A 10 years from now?

Then ask yourself, how will I feel about having chosen option B 10 minutes from now? How will I feel about having chosen option B 10 months from now? How will I feel about having chosen option B 10 years from now?

What I like about this method is that it doesn't give an automatic answer; it gives a broader perspective than just looking at the emotion you happen to feel right now. It enables you to take into consideration all three time frames: the short-term, the medium-term, and the long-term.

And when I look at all three time frames, what I ultimately want to do becomes very clear very easily.

You don't have to always choose the long-term results over the short-term results, but seeing what the long-term results are as well as what the short-term results are, gives you a better idea of what the costs are and what the gains are.

For instance, if option A is to drop everything and go to the hospital to visit a seriously ill friend, that may seem like a big hassle 10 minutes from now, but 10 months from now you know that

both you and your friend will be glad you were there, and 10 years from now you will cherish the friendship and not even remember what things you dropped doing.

Sometimes the 10-10-10 rule enables you to realize it's important to work less, other times the 10-10-10 rule enables you to realize it's important to work more. Things that seem huge 10 minutes from now may be really inconsequential 10 years from now, and vice versa. The 10-10-10 rule helps you see beyond the immediate impulse to what you ultimately want.

This 10-10-10 rule came to mind as I was thinking about Esau in today's Old Testament passage. What would have happened if Esau had used the 10-10-10 rule?

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."

So, Esau could think: If I choose the lentil stew, 10 minutes from now I'll feel great! Lentil stew is delicious! I've been out in the field and I'm famished and lentil stew will really hit the spot!

If I choose the lentil stew, 10 months from now, I won't even remember this meal. There will be plenty of meals between now and then. But I'll still have my younger brother around, and our sibling rivalry will be even deeper because I'll know that I was entitled to my birthright since I'm the oldest brother, and I lost it to him, and I'll regret it.

If I choose the lentil stew, 10 years from now our father will be dead, and everything that should have come to me in my birthright will have gone to my younger brother instead and I will hate him for taking it, and more than that, I will hate myself for having given it up.

If I choose the birthright, 10 minutes from now I'll be hungry. But I'm a tough guy out in the fields, and if I miss one meal it won't really do me in.

If I choose the birthright, 10 months from now life will go on, and I'll be glad knowing that my place in the family as the firstborn son is secure.

If I choose the birthright, 10 years from now our father will be dead, but I'll carry on with all the benefits of the birthright that I'm entitled to, and that my father always wanted me to have.

Wonderful!

It is too late for Esau to benefit from the 10-10-10 rule, but it is not too late for us. While the 10-10-10 rule comes in handy in a wide variety of secular settings, it is especially valuable in our spiritual lives, because our sins are very often the result of acting on an immediate impulse

without regard to the long-term effects, and our virtues are very often the result of considering the long-term effects as well as the medium-term and short-term effects. Let's look at the seven deadly sins; can we see how they often come from an immediate impulse: wrath, avarice, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. Let's look at seven virtues; can we see how they often come from considering long-term effects of actions: prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and charity.

What we are dealing with in our lives is a two-step process. Step one is to find out what we ultimately want, and step two is to actually do it. There will be times in our lives when we can see what the right choice is, and we won't have the strength to do it 100% of the time. We're not perfect. Still, the more clearly we can see what we ultimately want in the long-term as well as the short term, the more likely we are to push ourselves toward it. The 10-10-10 rule is one simple technique to improve our ability to see what we ultimately want, which strengthens our virtues. It won't eliminate 100% of our sins. But if using it can eliminate ten percent of the sins in our lives, or two percent of the sins in our lives, or any of the sins in our lives, then this sermon will have been worthwhile.

There is an interesting twist to all this, however. It is not unusual to pray, "God, help me to be a nicer person." I've prayed that myself. There are sometimes when it's exactly what we need. But there is also the phenomenon that writer Martha Beck refers to with the memorable phrase "exploding doormat." We've all seen it in other people and sometimes in ourselves. Someone does something that bothers you, and you don't say anything the first time. Or the second time. Or the third time. But by the tenth time, your silent resentment has built up so much that you explode into anger. The person who annoyed you may have no idea what hit him. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a doormat explosion, you know how horrible it feels. By the time the explosion strikes, it is too late to find a solution to the problem, and anger that seems so out of proportion to the event leaves you feeling either helpless or furious yourself. It can happen at work, at home, or in organizations. There are some relationships that end completely because of these explosions, or become so tense or distant that the relationships might as well not exist.

Ironically, the principles of the 10-10-10 rule are valuable here too. Ten minutes from now, it can feel awkward to bring up what's bothering you. It can feel very uncomfortable to say, "When you criticized me in front of my colleagues, I felt pretty embarrassed" or "When you left

a mess I had to clean up, I felt really taken for granted.” Or even, “When you’re late, it really bothers me.” But ten months from now, the relationship will be much more stable. And this is where the 10-10-10 rule converges with the golden rule: “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”.

Wouldn’t you rather have someone just tell you that you bothered them the first or second time, rather than getting more resentful until they explode at you? Then go ahead and do the same for them. Ten minutes from now it’s tough. Ten months and ten years from now, you’ll still get along and be glad you did it. Sometimes, it’s better to pray, “Lord, make me a braver person.”

A similar dynamic happens in lying. When researchers ask people, “When is it okay to lie?” people usually come up with a variety of situations in which they think it’s okay to lie. But when researchers ask people, “When is it okay for other people to lie to you?” suddenly the list gets a lot shorter. With very few exceptions, we do not want to be lied to. We use the rationalization that we lie to make the other person feel better, but if the situation were reversed, would you want someone to do that to you, or would you want someone you could trust to tell you the truth? Ten minutes from now it may feel easier to lie. Ten years from now, we wonder why our relationships seem so shallow, why we have so few people we can truly be ourselves with. So, when you are in a situation in which you could choose to lie or choose to tell the truth, it helps to consider the 10-10-10 rule, and to consider whether in that situation you’d want someone to lie to you or to tell you the truth.

The other really wonderful thing I’ve noticed the more I’ve used the 10-10-10 rule, is that things that used to seem tough don’t seem so tough anymore. Ten minutes from now, it may seem tough to have that difficult conversation, but since you know it will turn out better for the next ten years, you just do it and get it over with, and then as soon as it’s done, it isn’t tough anymore. By definition, things that seem difficult before you do them, are not difficult once they’re done. Worrying about it makes it more difficult. Doing it is the easiest way to make it not difficult.

The more we practice our virtues, the easier they become. Our virtues are our birthright, given to us as children of God. We can trade them for a bowl of lentil stew, or we can receive our birthright of prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope, and love. God knows that each of us is a work in progress, and God isn’t finished with us yet. And so we pray, in the

words of today's collect, "mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them." Amen.