

## “Do You Recall John Kennedy’s Plane Crash?”

### Proverbs 16:25

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They determined it was pilot error. A year after John Kennedy’s Piper Saratoga II crashed into the ocean off Martha’s Vineyard on July 16, 1999, the National Transportation Safety Board concluded that he became disoriented while flying over the water through a thick haze. His decisions, though well intentioned, were fatal. Instead of flying above the ocean, he headed his plane directly into the water killing him, his wife and his wife’s sister. I have no doubt that Kennedy thought he was doing the right thing but his lack of expertise and experience proved otherwise. I grieve for these families as they soon mark the fourth anniversary of that horrible night.

Kennedy’s fatal crash reminds me of Proverbs 16:25. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” What’s the message in this verse for us today?

**The underlying premise of this verse is that we have the freedom to make choices.** I’m certainly glad about this because I cherish freedom. This also flatters me because it reveals the confidence God has in all of us to make wise decisions. Free will is by Divine design. God wanted this for us and gave it to us.

**This verse also teaches me that choices come with consequences, good and bad.** In particular, Proverbs 16:25 highlights the negative consequences that accompany flawed decisions. Some choices can lead to death, the death of a relationship, career, dream, potential and influence. As in the case of John Kennedy, some choices can even lead to our own death along with others. This is why we need to take all decisions seriously and make wise choices. There is too much at stake to be irresponsible and foolish.

Perhaps the most important thing this verse says to me, though, is this. **We need help to make wise choices.** We are capable of making bad choices even though they seem good to us. We can be moments away from a crash and not even know it. Frightening, isn’t it?

**Where can we turn for help in making wise decisions?** There are many places. Turn to **family members and friends** that have made good decisions down through the years. Seek their advice and counsel. Glean from their experiences what can help you along your journey.

I found Gene Patterson’s article about former Governor Lester Maddox very intriguing. He told of the Saturday that Maddox entered the deserted *Atlanta Constitution* newsroom and asked for Ralph McGill, a writer for the paper. Patterson could hardly believe that Maddox was there because there was no love between Maddox and the press. They were often on the opposite sides of Civil Rights issues.

When McGill walked in a few minutes after Maddox arrived, Maddox approached him and said, “I’ve come here to thank you for your letter and to tell you that sometimes your worst enemy can turn out to be your best friend. I thank you for guiding me right.”

The letter Maddox referred to was written by McGill to Maddox about his son. Maddox’s son had gotten into trouble with the law for the second time and his advisors

were urging him to denounce and disown his son or risk discrediting his law and order campaign. McGill was a father, too, and this plan of action troubled him. He wrote Maddox a letter encouraging Maddox not to abandon his son. "You're his father and he is your son and this is a time when he needs you, no matter what he's done."

Maddox thanked McGill that morning, gave him a bearhug, shook his hand and quietly left. According to Patterson, "Both men wept and so did I."

Along this same vein, listen to those that **disagree with you**. If your logic cannot overrule theirs, there must be a reason. Step back and think about it before proceeding. Don't crash your life in front of those that are trying to prevent it from happening.

I am amazed at the number of accidents that occur at railroad crossings when the lights are flashing and the barrier has been lowered. More car/train accidents occur when the warning signals are in operation than when they are not. Why? Some people feel they can beat the odds and ignore the warning. This is true in life, too. How many times have I talked to someone that said, "I wish I had listened to..."

Look to **professional counselors** that will ask you penetrating questions and will make you think about consequences to decisions. Let them help you chart a course for your life that leads to fulfillment not disillusionment. Especially seek their assistance in developing a strategy for overcoming bad decisions.

Learn from people that you might not ever meet through the **books** they have written that teach, inspire and motivate you to make wise choices. Open your heart and mind to their counsel as you turn the pages of their story.

I shall never forget the day I read Parker Palmer's book, Let Your Life Speak. He hooked me on the first page when he wrote, "It is possible to live a life other than your own." I knew he had something to say about choices that I needed to hear. So does Gloria White in her new book, The Path to Grace. Gloria is one of the counselors on staff at Smoke Rise that has taught me a lot about self-discovery. I am currently reading her book and discovering new tools for decision making.

Most importantly, though, turn to the **Lord** for guidance and direction. I assure you that no one knows you better or loves you more than He does. He wants you to make wise decisions and reap the rewards of them. Nothing delights Him more. You can trust Him with all your heart.

So, read and study His word, which is filled with the advice a loving parent would give a child. Spend time with Him in prayer and ask for enlightenment and direction. Tap into His inexhaustible supply of strength and courage to do what is right and resist the temptation to do wrong. You will be glad and so will those around you.

I have been told that John Kennedy could have avoided this tragedy had he done one thing while in flight. His plane was equipped with automatic pilot and landing capabilities. Had he activated these, the plane would have flown directly to the designated airport and even landed without his assistance. All he had to do was put his confidence in the plane's computer and utilize it. It would have saved his life.

Putting confidence in God and exercising your faith can do the same for you. I hope you will remember this the next time you face a decision that could lead to life or death.