

The Fourth and Fifth Rs Respect and Responsibility

Volume 4, Issue 1

Summer 1998

The Choices We Get To Make

Hal Urban, High School Teacher

In my high school classes, I frequently hear questions that begin, “*Do we have to . . .*” “*Do we have to know this?*” “*Do we have to read that?*”

My answer is always the same: “**No, you get to.** You don’t have to do anything in life, but you *get* to do a lot of things.” It’s really a much healthier way of looking at life. It reminds us that we have choices.

True, it wasn’t our choice to be born into the world. And it’s not our choice that someday we’re going to die. However, the period in between, the one we call life, presents us with countless choices. They’re the choices that determine the quality of our lives.

We’re free to choose our character—the type of persons we become. We can become less than we’re capable of, or we can become all that we’re capable of.

We’re free to choose our values. We can let the media tell us what’s important, or we can decide for ourselves. We can base our standards on what others are doing, or we can base them on what we know is right and good.

We’re free to choose how to treat other people. We can put them down, or we can lift them up. We can be self-centered and inconsiderate, or we can be respectful, kind and helpful.

We’re free to choose how to handle adversity. We can allow ourselves to be crushed, to give up, and to feel sorry for ourselves. Or we can choose to look for a source of strength within us, to persevere, and to make the most out of what life hands us.

We’re free to choose how much we’ll learn. We can look upon learning as an unpleasant duty or as a great opportunity for bettering ourselves.

We’re free to choose what we’ll accomplish in life. We can allow our circumstances or other people to determine what we make of ourselves, or we can choose our own direction and goals. We can be undisciplined and lazy, or we can be self-disciplined and hardworking.

We’re free to choose our belief system. We can ignore our spiritual nature or we can accept it as a basic dimension of life. We can worship pleasure and the world’s material things, or we can look for something that’s ultimately more important.

We’re free to choose our purpose. We can wander aimlessly, or we can search for meaning in life and then live according to it. We can live to please ourselves, or we can find a cause that’s greater—one that helps us to understand and appreciate life more fully.

We’re free to choose our attitude, regardless of circumstances. This is the most important choice we’ll ever make because it affects everything we do. ■



Dr. Hal Urban taught American History and Psychology at Woodside High School, California. The article above is excerpted from his popular book, *20 Gifts of Life* (formerly *Life's Greatest Lessons*) available from the author: www.halurban.com; e-mail halurban@halurban.com.