

THE BEST QUESTION EVER

A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO DECISION MAKING



ANDY STANLEY

THE BEST QUESTION EVER

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Introduction

IF ONLY...

The Best Question Ever? Who do I think I am? We've never even met and I have written an entire book based on the premise that I know *the* question that trumps every other question you could ask about your life. And doesn't the word *Ever* hint of naïveté on my part? *Ever*? As in the history of mankind?

Perhaps I should have gone with *The Best Question I Know*. Or maybe, *A Really Good Question*. But the truth is, I believe the question I'm about to pose really *is* the Best Question Ever. For everybody.

This may not be the most *important* question ever; there are probably more important questions. But as you are about to discover, the Best Question Ever will help bring clarity to the important questions. A more important question for you might be, "Should I take this job?" Or, "Is she the one for me?" Or, "Does God want me to move?" "Lease or buy?" "Should I stay or leave?" The Best Question Ever will bring you fresh insight to all of these questions.

So what makes this question *the* best question? Three things. First, it can be applied to every decision you ever make

for the rest of your life. Second, it is a question that is easy to answer; in most cases you will know the answer immediately. Third, it is a question that pierces the fog of self-deception.

Bottom line, what makes the Best Question Ever the best question ever is that it is the most *helpful* question ever.

LOOKING BACK

If the title of this book seems a bit over the top, my next statement may send you scrambling back to your local bookstore in search of a refund. In fact, I have been staring at my computer screen for the past fifteen minutes, wondering just how foolish it would be for me to make the claim I am about to make this early in the book. But having just read through the entire manuscript, I'm more convinced than ever.

So here goes.

Your greatest regret could have been avoided had you asked the Best Question Ever and then acted on your conclusion.

A bit strong?

Regardless of whether it is an action or event you regret or an entire chapter of your life that you wish you could do over, had you evaluated your options through the lens of this single powerful question, you would have avoided what may be your greatest ongoing source of pain. As you move through the pages that follow, you may find that this one question could have changed the trajectory of your entire life.

The Best Question Ever is a question I ask more than once every day. It is a question that guided me through my

late twenties as a single man. It is a question that has served me well through sixteen incredible years of marriage. It is a question I have taught my three kids to ask about every option that comes their way. They know it is the lens through which we evaluate every decision we make as a family.

Over the past twenty years I have had the opportunity to teach this principle to thousands of middle-school and high school students. Many of them are adults now with children of their own. Letters, e-mails, and conversations assure me that the Best Question Ever continues to serve as a decision-making filter for scores of these young adults.

When I share the Best Question Ever with adult audiences, the response is nearly always the same: “I wish I had heard this years ago.” Translated: “I could have avoided some regret if only...”

The Best Question Ever serves as a lens through which you can evaluate your options. It is a filter that casts things in their actual light. It is a grid that provides context for every decision. The Best Question Ever will provide you with a new perspective on your love life, your career, your finances, your family, your schedule—everything. The Best Question Ever will shed light on issues the Bible doesn’t specifically address.

But the Best Question Ever is not always an easy question to ask. It can be a bit threatening. It exposes so much about our hearts and our motives that it is, well, it’s just not an easy question to ask. That’s just one more reason why it is the Best Question Ever.

LOOKING AHEAD

This book is divided into six sections. In section 1 you will be introduced to the Question. It takes me a couple of chapters to get to it, so be patient. In the three sections that follow, we will apply the Best Question Ever to three key areas of life: your time, your money, and your relationships. In section 5 I'm going to let you in on a secret known by all the world's best decision-makers. In the final section I'm going to challenge you to make a decision that will allow you to get the maximum benefit from the Best Question Ever.

The principle behind *The Best Question Ever* has impacted my decisions, and consequently my life, more than any other. This is more than another book for me. This is a life message. The content is not simply pulled from a series of sermons; it is drawn from the past twenty-two years of my life's journey.

All right, it is time to get started. I hope you enjoy the book. More importantly, I hope this powerful question becomes a permanent part of your decision-making process. If you have the courage to ask it, your Heavenly Father will use this simple question to guide and protect you in the days to come. And as you experience the difference this question makes, I think you will agree that it really is the Best Question Ever.

—*Andy Stanley*

Part I

THE QUESTION

1

DUMB AND DUMBER

Finding Common Ground

You and I have something in common. We've both done some really dumb stuff. Stuff we hope nobody ever finds out about. Stuff we wish we could forget. There's money we wish we hadn't spent, cars we wish we had never bought, investments we wish we hadn't made, invitations we wish we hadn't accepted, relationships we wish we had stayed out of, jobs we wish we had never taken, partnerships we never should have entered into, phone calls we never should have returned, contracts we never should have signed.

If you are like me, you look back and wonder, *How could I have been so dumb? So blind? So foolish?* We should have known better. In some cases, we did know better, but for some reason we thought we could beat the odds—that we would be the exceptions to the rule. In spite of what common sense (and maybe a friend or two) told us, we believed that we could control the outcome of our decisions.

So we followed our hearts, we trusted our emotions, we did our own thing, and now we wonder what in the world we were thinking.

If you're like most people, some of the decisions you wish you could unmake led to chapters of your life you wish you could go back and unlive. Picking a stock based on a bad tip is one thing; choosing a marriage partner without doing some due diligence is something else entirely. Making four \$24.95 payments on something that's only worth \$24.95 to begin with is embarrassing; \$25,000 in credit card debt can ruin you.

Some of our bad decisions simply embarrass us. Others scar us.

What's obvious now wasn't so obvious then. And what's obvious to us now may not be so obvious to everybody around us. Chances are, you've already bumped into somebody on the verge of making the same dumb decision you made when you were his age. And, as I was, you were sure that once he heard your sad story, he would drop to his knees in gratitude for your life-changing insight. Having come to grips with the error of his ways, he would immediately reverse course, call off the marriage, pay cash, tear up the contract, dissolve the partnership, sell his drums, stay in school, or whatever.

But no. Instead, he endures our tales of woe, thanks us for the unsolicited advice, and continues full speed ahead into the oncoming train. And we think back and wonder,

Could I have possibly been that naive? That stubborn? That foolish?

Yep.

POOR PLANNING

When we watch people we know—or strangers for that matter—make foolish decisions, it's as if they are strategically and intentionally setting out to mess up their lives.

After all, it takes a lot of planning to marry the wrong person. Any marriage, even a bad one, is not a casual endeavor. Think of the time and energy it takes to set up a doomed business partnership or to start a business that has no hope of success. Think about all the paperwork people have to wade through to purchase houses they can't really afford or lease cars they are going to lose or apply for loans they can't repay.

Having watched dozens of people methodically waste their lives, potential, and money, I've concluded that while nobody *plans* to mess up his life, the problem is that few of us *plan not to*. That is, we don't put the necessary safeguards in place to ensure a happy ending.

Nobody plans to destroy his marriage, but few people take precautions that guarantee "as long as we both shall live."

Nobody plans to raise irresponsible, codependent children, but it's clear from looking at society that a bunch of parents don't plan not to.

Nobody plans an addiction, but it happens. Why? A lack of necessary precaution.

I haven't talked to anyone who planned to be buried under a mountain of credit-card debt, but I've met a lot of people who didn't plan not to be.

Our poor planning leads precisely where we had no intention of going. And once there we ask, "How did this happen to me?"

The Best Question Ever will provide the answer.

Better yet, the Best Question Ever will help you stay out of the situations and circumstances that rob you of your potential, your opportunities, and your future.



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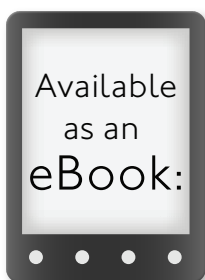
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