

ANDY STANLEY



ASK IT

The Question That Will
Revolutionize
How You Make Decisions

Revised and Updated from *The Best Question Ever*

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This book is dedicated to Lanny Donoho.

*Solomon was right—there is a friend
who sticks closer than a brother. You have been
that kind of friend to me. Thank you.*

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Introduction

If Only...

I see that big question mark in your eyes.

Well, not really. I can't actually observe it from this far away—but I bet it's there. Most of us, most of the time, are weighing some big question or two or three concerning our lives, and we keep encountering new ones all the time:

Do I stay or go?

Is he (or she) the right one for me?

Should I buy this? Sell that? Start this? Stop that? Invest here?

Commit there?

I know a question that makes it easy to determine the answer to all these others.

It's the question that answers just about everything for everybody, for the rest of our lives, and at every stage of our lives. It brings clarity and fresh insight for each decision we have to make. It pierces the fog of our self-deception and erases all those shades of gray that cloud our reasoning. It takes us beyond simple right

and wrong, beyond what's merely legal, beyond the lowest common denominator.

And if we're honest with ourselves, God will use this question in the deepest parts of our lives to help take us to the place of our fullest potential.

Not only that, but it's a fairly easy question to answer. In most cases, you'll know the answer immediately.

Looking Back

This is a question that will save you a lot of time, a lot of money, a lot of stress, and—more importantly—lots of tears. I can even state the case this way:

Your greatest regret could have been avoided had you asked this particular question and then acted on your conclusion.

Regardless of whether it's 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 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 single question could have changed the trajectory of your entire life.

It's a question I ask often every day. It's a question that guided

me through my late twenties as a single man. It's a question that has served me well through twenty-six incredible years of marriage. It's a question I've taught my three kids to ask about every option that comes their way. They absorbed it, because it's the lens through which we learned to evaluate every decision we made as a family.

Over the past thirty years, I've 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 this big question continues to serve as a decision-making filter for scores of these young adults.

When I share this valuable question with adult audiences, the response is nearly always the same: "I wish I'd heard this years ago." Translated: "I could have avoided some regret, if only..."

This single question serves as a lens through which you can evaluate all your options. It's a filter that casts things in their actual light. It's a grid that provides context for every choice. It will provide you with a new perspective on your love life, your career, your finances, your family, your schedule—everything. It's a question that will shed light on issues the Bible doesn't specifically address.

But it's not *always* an easy question to ask. Sometimes it can be a bit threatening, because it exposes so much about our hearts and our motives. But that's just one more reason it's so revolutionizing.

Looking Ahead

This book is divided into six parts.

In the first part, you'll be introduced to our big question. It takes me a couple of chapters to get to it, so be patient.

The second part explores some common (and dangerous) alternatives to asking our big question.

In the next two parts, we'll apply our question to two key areas of life: your time and your relationships.

Then, in the fifth part, I'll let you in on a secret known by all the world's best decision makers.

Finally, in the last part I'll challenge you to make a decision that allows you to get the maximum benefit from this question.

The principle behind this valuable question 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 isn't simply pulled from a series of sermons; it's drawn from the years of my life's journey.

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 significant difference this question makes, I think you'll agree that it's one you'll want to keep asking for the rest of your life.

Part 1



The Question



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 we could control the outcomes 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 on-

coming 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 happy endings.

Nobody plans to destroy her 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 didn't plan not to.

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

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 answer to that comes by asking another question that's far better—the question this book is all about.

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



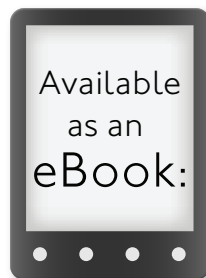
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