

I was wrong for over a quarter-century. Worse, I was wrong for over a quarter-century on the most important choice that a person can ever make in life. That's because I didn't apply the principle that is the topic of this episode. ...Well, how's that for an opener? We'll visit that story later.

The title of this podcast episode is "*Before Proceeding, You Must...*" What this means is that each key step in a successful decision-making process requires assumptions and presuppositions. And those key assumptions and presuppositions need to be well-understood and fitting into the decision-making process. Can I be blunt here? In my experience, this just doesn't happen very often.

Wait, wait, wait, you say! Are you kidding? Assumptions....? Presuppositions...? You're saying that—when I am a decision-maker—I should know the essential assumptions...the premises...the presuppositions... before I execute my role in the decision-making process? Well...yes, that's exactly what I'm saying!

But that is exactly what *doesn't* happen a whole lot by executives in charge of businesses and nonprofits. Here's a couple of examples. Over the past couple of decades, just which retailers were proceeding with wise decisions that reflected an accurate belief that Amazon was a serious threat? And how about Nokia? Before proceeding, was Nokia's phone strategy properly considering the idea of Apple iPhones? The truth is, the competitive landscape is littered with faltering and failed companies that unthinkingly moved forward with their assumptions of a "business as usual" when it comes to decision-making processes.

And that's true at every key step of a decision-making process—even before raw data that is even gathered! That's because, yes, there are even assumptions about what raw data...what source materials... are important! For example, let's go right to the most important issue for all humanity. How have various people around the world viewed the Bible over the centuries? Well, that varies a whole lot! Some say the Bible's a series of myths. Some say it's an old book full of good sayings. Some say it's a bloodbath of violence sanctioned by an unworthy God. Some say the Bible is just literature. And some say the Bible is the Word of God, trustworthy in every way for life today and life forever. Wow, those are just five views!

Hey, every one of those viewpoints are assumptions...presuppositions...*conclusions* that people have reached that organically have very different outcomes, both here and now *and* eternally! Jesus, the Word of God and Chief Data Officer(!), taught and elicited vital things about assumptions—starting with this:

"[Jesus] said to [his disciples], 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" (Matthew 16:15-16 ESV) Of course, many people hear this information and don't believe it, so they act as if it's not true. But many others do believe it and act like it *is* true, that Jesus actually *is* the Christ—the Messiah for all who would call upon His name! Foundationally, that piece of information is what must be grappled with and concluded upon. For sure, *before proceeding, you must...do what?* ...Decide whether Jesus is the Christ! *Ignoring that actually becomes a choice made!*

And deciding that affirmatively becomes what your core source material for life is—virtually everything depends on whether you go with the Bible. Or you go with the Koran. Or you go with the Book of Mormon. Or you go with Darwin. Or you go with your human instincts. Each of those is a significantly different path and destination. So. *Before proceeding, you must...decide!* And, again, *not deciding is actually a decision!*

But say you *do* go with the Bible as your source. Your work is still not done! When you look at the data in the Bible, do you have the work ethic and the discernment from the Holy Spirit to understand the data in the way God intends? The truth is, for centuries theologians who say they claim Christ often disagree about major issues that truly will make a huge difference for their fellow travelers—now and for eternity! And because each of us has to *own our own theology*, we'd better know the assumptions that we're making about the key source—the Bible. How about this teaching by Jesus...? (As you listen, remember that these verses are important because the hearers are already paying attention to Jesus as a source!)

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” Matthew 7:21-27 (ESV) ...I think we can safely say that Jesus was providing data and challenging assumptions here!

See, this is sort of a second stage, what Jesus called a “hearing and doing” phase of decision-making. Many a person claims Jesus as a source, but not “doing” what Jesus taught results in a house built on sand! That’s right, *before proceeding, you must...hear and do what the legitimate data source directs you to do!*

But the next point is sadly poignant...and spiritually dangerous...and very common in America! What can foster a sandy foundation is that people kinda assume they *are* doing what Jesus taught. Perhaps their parents or their teachers or their pastors or their cultural poohbahs have led them to believe so. That’s my story. For years, in a mainline church perched on the pancake-flat High Plains of America, the Christian life that was taught and lived in our pews was pancake-flat, too. No Gospel. No baptisms. No healings. No personal testimonies of changed lives. No startling wonderment of becoming a new creature in Christ.

Instead, a sort of human “goodness” was assumed, a marching in mundane lockstep—just being a bit better than your neighbor and a lot better than the local drug dealer. I spent decades in that shallow brand of fake-Christianity. Gotta own that mistake! Then I responded to God’s gift of grace manifested by Jesus at the Cross. Wow. *Assumptions changed, radically*—just as God offers to everyone! But, sadly, ever since the Cross, assumptions about the Bible and Jesus have often been mishandled, distorted, underapplied, even ignored. Beware, you...and those around you...have much at stake! *Before proceeding, you must...*

Wait, you say...all that nonsense is not *my* story! You are *in Christ*, following Jesus, living a robust life of wonderment and grace! Hallelujah! That’s truly a big deal—God’s great purposes being fulfilled in you!

Still, our lives in Christ beg a periodic re-examination. And the Apostle Paul gives a measuring stick for how we will be evaluated at that final Judgement Seat of Christ, the time and place where every believer’s life will be fully revealed and rewarded! Or *not* rewarded! Notice here that Paul is careful to refer to Jesus as the Christ. That’s because Jesus didn’t have a last name of Christ, He fulfilled the role of Messiah...of Deliverer...yes, the Christ, the Anointed One! Here’s what Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 3:9-15 ESV):

“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” That’s God’s reward structure...beyond salvation! *Before proceeding, we must ponder that!*

In my personal experience—both in healthy organizations and as the turnaround leader for organizations in trouble—an essential foundation for success is to constantly challenge assumptions at all stages: from relying only on worthy authorities, to wisely considering emerging influences, to choosing data sources before carefully gathering data, to astutely interpreting and applying the data. For businesses, nonprofits, and churches, the constant necessity is this: *before proceeding, we must know and challenge assumptions!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. As a believer “not under the Law but under grace” (Romans 6:14), *who do you say that Moses is?* Is he your Lawgiver? Are you maybe just as much a “Mosesite” as a Jesus-follower, trying to supposedly “balance” law and grace...or perhaps even trying futilely to fulfill the Law that Jesus already fulfilled on your behalf? Discuss.
2. It’s really easy to just assume that our families, our bosses, and our pastors have it all pretty much nailed when it comes to foundational assumptions about key decisions we face now and in the future. But the actual histories of many families, businesses, and churches is that not everybody has their assumptions well assessed, adopted, and applied. What processes and mindset do you have in place to assure you personally know and challenge assumptions in these areas on an ongoing basis? Be specific.
3. Have you noticed that many decision-makers—say, political leaders, business leaders, and Church leaders—have glaring blind spots that are obvious to you and others...but their supporting voters, board members, and church members are happily oblivious as “yes-people?” What processes have you put in place as a leader to avoid falling into cultivating this type of faulty dynamic in your organization? Be specific.