

Shell Game (Choices) (Obedience)

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live. Deuteronomy 30:19

The Basic Bible Truth

Life is filled with choices. From the moment we arise in the morning, till we lay our head on a pillow at night, we make choices. Some may seem mundane and small, others huge and daunting. A solid understanding of Scripture and a close walk with God will fill any decision making process with confidence.

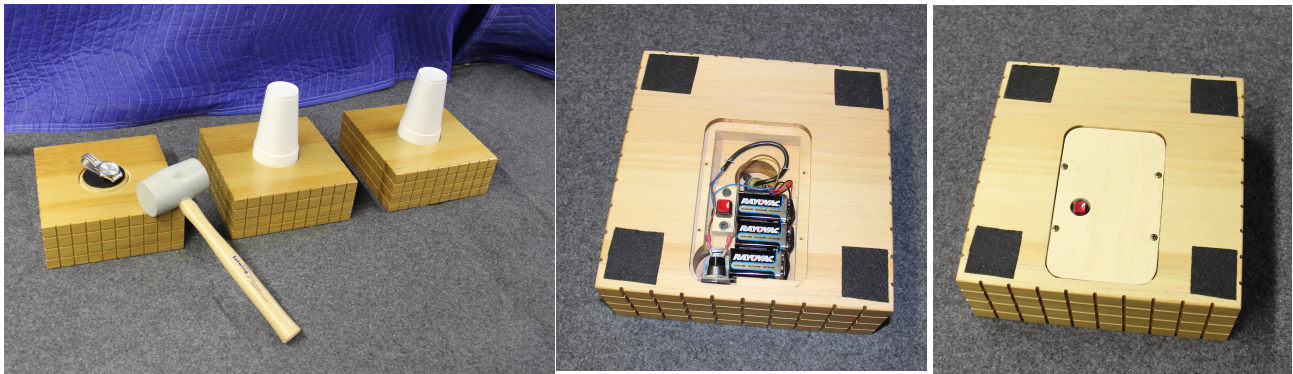
The Object

A Large Wood-With-Hidden-Electronics Shell Game

A Large Rubber Mallet

A Wrist Watch

A Large Blanket



This lesson is a take off from the classic walnut shells and hidden peas sleight of hand illusion. I have made it bigger, very slow and methodical, and with hidden electronics as the secret to the solution. Being a woodworker by trade has a few advantages when it comes to building some of my props. This one is actually quite simple, but needs to be done well.

I start with three absolutely identical blocks of hardwood with no recognizable grain patterns to allow a method of distinguishing one from another. Drilled in from the bottom of each block is a cavity which holds three 9 volt batteries wired in series to give me 27 volts DC current to power the electronics. Just under the top surface of the block I have placed a metal proximity sensor/switch, that when metal is close enough to the sensor, it switches the 27 volt current to “on” and a very, very tiny light bulb illuminates which can only be seen from the back side of the blocks of wood.

Usually I give my watch to an individual so I can “borrow” it when I need a watch. I ask the person with the watch to come to the front, place “their” watch on a felt lined thin metal plate, choose any one of the blocks of wood to place it on, and then cover all three blocks of wood with an overturned Styrofoam cup. This is all done behind a blanket or sheet, so that they are the only person in the room who knows where the watch actually is, including me. I will be able to discern where it is in a minute when I step back

behind the blocks of wood and see the small light shining. Once I have determined where the watch is, I try to guide the decision making process to my advantage. I will normally take a quick vote to see which cup everyone thinks has the watch underneath. If they vote incorrectly, we start with phase two. If they vote correctly, I talk awhile about how choices matter in life and then take a revote. Usually, there will be enough people who will change their vote and the majority will be wrong.

Now we add consequences into the discussion. I find a volunteer, hand them the large rubber mallet, and with one very aggressive blow, have them completely obliterate the cup the class chose as the most likely candidate for the watch. The crowd is often wrong when we go looking for advice.

Then we discuss the right way to make choices in life, and we end with the volunteer obliterating the cup without the watch and I hand the watch over to the person I “borrowed” it from.

The Lesson

How do you make choices in life? It is a very important question to ask. We all make a myriad of choices each day, and even the smallest ones can make a huge difference in our lives. When I was a young man in college, my roommate was a bit of a wallflower. He would do nothing outside of studying and going to class. So I convinced him that we should go to a college sponsored roller skating night at the roller rink. Reluctantly he went with me. We skated for a while and I think he actually had fun. Then came the “couples only skate” announcement over the loud speaker, and we both took off across the rink to a bevy of girls from college. I had my eye on one, but just as I was almost there, my roommate asked her to skate and the two of them took off around the rink hand in hand. I was left in a somewhat awkward position. I didn’t know the only girl that was left, but I asked her to skate and she said yes and we started off hand in hand. It was a disaster. She couldn’t seem remember my name and had to ask me four times as we skated. When it was over, I was honestly glad, and thought nothing more of it. To make a long story short, I have been married to that young lady, who couldn’t remember my name, now for 42 years. And I heard that the other girl died of cancer a few years ago. My life would have been so different were it not for circumstances and a simple choice I made that day. Even the little things can lead to big things.

I have here in front of me, three identical blocks of wood. Routed in the top of each is a little recessed circle that just happens to fit the lip of a Styrofoam cup. It fits snugly just like this. What I would like to do is to borrow someone’s wristwatch. May I borrow yours? I noticed you were wearing a nice one there. It is beautiful. Was it a gift from someone special? I promise to take care of it. In fact, why don’t you come up here and take care of it for me? Here is what I would like you to do. Place your watch on this nice felt lined metal plate, so it won’t get scratched up, and choose any one of the three blocks of wood to place your watch on, and then cover all three blocks of wood with a Styrofoam cup. We will hold up a blanket here so no one else in the room will know where your watch is except you.

Very good. Now if I could get a second person up here, I would like you to shuffle the blocks around and mix them up good behind this blanket, so now, absolutely no one in this room knows where the watch is, including me. Let’s take a poll. How many think the watch might be under cup #1...#2...#3.

It is tempting, when facing a choice, to go to the people around you and look at how they are living their lives and choose accordingly. That may not be the best way to make a decision. Let me explain how that might work. As I said before, choices matter. They have consequences. So let’s introduce that dynamic into my little demonstration. I need another volunteer to come up here. I have something very special to give you. This is a 3 pound rubber mallet. The class has voted and most of them think that the watch is under cup number two. Let’s pull this block over here to the side, and I want you to swing that mallet with everything you have and smash that Styrofoam cup as flat as you can. OK?

Nicely done! And look, no watch. What a relief. Now, may I suggest to you that going to those around you and asking them for a vote of confidence may not be the best way to make a decision. I have discovered in life, that the crowd is often wrong about many things. We need a better method of decision making that just guessing, because choice have consequences, and I would like to be able to give this gentlemen an undamaged watch when we are done here today.

So, we have two left. A 50-50 chance of choosing right or wrong. I am not comfortable with odds like that. The risk is too high. I want a better way. Moses addressed the people of Israel as his life of leading them was coming to an end. He reminded them of all that they had witnessed in those 40 years, how God had provided for them, and tried to teach them. He reminded them that they had a wonderful set of laws, handwritten by God Himself, for them to follow. He pointed to all of that and said that they could take that entire bundle of evidence and make wise choices in life. We have the same option. We can look at the Bible and the stories that God has placed there for us to reflect on, and He has given us specific commands that direct how we are to live our lives. But He will generally not force His will on us. We have a free choice to make.

I can honestly say that it has not always been easy in my life. It is tempting to allow our own selfish desires to creep in and influence our decision making process. But if we know the Bible well and we know our God well, we will know how to play the game of life well. And that is the key to playing any game—to know how it is played. I know how this game that I brought to show you today is played. I know the subtleties of the game and that gives me an edge over the rest of you. You have a 50-50 chance of getting the next choice we make here right. I, on the other hand...SLAM...have a 100% chance of getting the choice right the first and only time I have left. Look at that, the watch is under this last cup and I have the privilege of handing it back to the one I borrowed it from. Thank you for trusting me with your watch.

Ladies and gentlemen, when you are faced with even minor choices in life, remember how to play the game. Look to a relationship with your God and read His Word regularly. It will give you the edge you need to be successful in life with all of your choices.