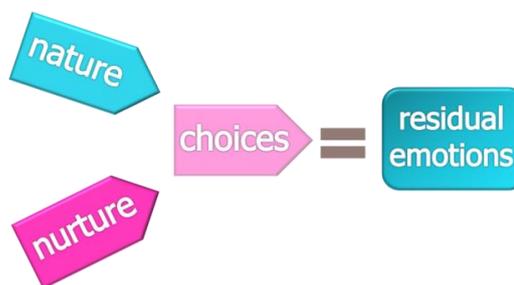
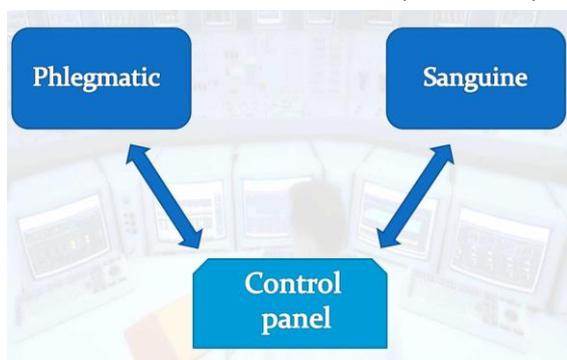


The Story of Will

Choice played an important role in our development as we grew up. (See [Step Two: Session 4: Processing emotions](#)) Now we have grown up, the ability to make good decisions will determine whether unhelpful patterns are broken and we live up to our full potential. Through faith in Christ we are set free to make good choices (e.g. Romans 6:11, 14; Revelation 1:5) but so often we struggle to make the right call. So, here is a story about Will:

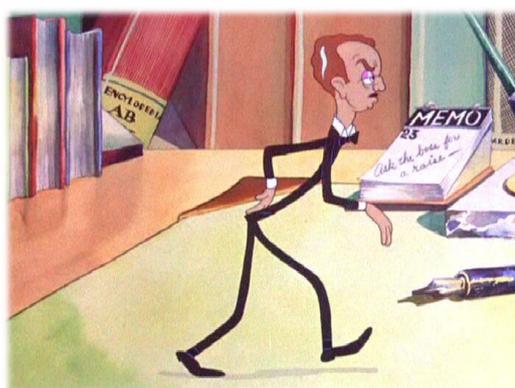


Will has a very important job. He goes off to work each day and spends long hours there. He is responsible for monitoring signals that are sent in by his two temperaments and deciding what to do with them. He sits at his control panel every day – and makes choices. His Phlegmatic might suggest that he puts off that difficult phone call – Will has to decide whether to go along with that surge of emotion – or overrule it in the interests of dealing with the issue. Anxiety, guilt or self-protection – is Will strong enough to resist? His job is so much easier when the good things start coming through. That desire to empathise, to reach out in love – but wait, here is that capacity for warmth – better make sure that is only used constructively. Will is busy – and that is only one of the temperaments!



In the midst of it all is another voice – God’s voice. Does Will really want to know what God thinks? Is he actively listening out for that still, small voice? The Bible makes it clear that, as Christians, we have been set free to make good choices and through the death and resurrection of Jesus we can count ourselves *‘dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus’* (Romans 6:11). The good news is that we are able to choose to follow the direction and impulses of God’s Spirit – and so find life and wholeness – and that when we make the right choices the same power that raised Jesus from the dead becomes active in our everyday situations (Romans 8). We even find that God is actively engaged in drawing us into those right choices (Philippians 2:13).

But is Will really up to this task? He is constantly reading the signals, sending responses back that will determine a course of action and shape his character. Those decisions can hurt or heal, destroy or build. He needs a good instinct, proper training and constant vigilance. Was he trained – or was he allowed to collapse, or be moody, or selfish? Was he brought up in a family where his parents were able to connect with him and yet were bigger than him? Was he taught to handle his emotions constructively for the benefit of others or were they allowed to spill out and do damage? Was there a discipline that meant he is now the master of self-discipline?



Was Will taught, not to deny his emotions, but to handle them? Did he learn to take responsibility for his actions and attitudes or was he allowed to make excuses, blame his circumstances, or other people? Is Will strong – or a wimp?



Maybe Will was brought up in such an atmosphere of criticism, spoken or implied, that today he is weary, disillusioned and without direction. There are many wonderful people out there who have simply given up and all the God-given good has been allowed to pour out in unhealthy and destructive ways. The flowing river serves a useful purpose as long as the water stays within the banks. When the banks burst that same water becomes damaging and even life-threatening. So, how do we go about getting Will back to fitness so he can do his job properly?

1. He must decide what he wants. Does it matter to you to be whole, joined up on the inside, using the whole of who you are, walking with God? If the desire is there then Will knows what criteria he is working to. Get that central issue right and then we can aim at other good targets – giving family their rightful place, fulfilling God’s calling on our lives and developing a healthy lifestyle.

2. Good food and atmosphere. If Will is sickly and weary, he needs to surround himself with people who will lift him up, encourage and inspire him and point him in the right direction. He must feed on material that will do the same.

3. Exercise. We need Will to be fit and healthy. If he isn’t, very few of those good things will happen. Our physical muscles develop as we push against the resistance. Why not determine to do at least one thing each day that you don’t feel like doing? Make it something constructive – something you would normally put off. Don’t just go with what comes easiest – make tough choices that will shape you. When you go back on a good choice you weaken yourself but when you stand firm your muscles are strengthened for the next challenge.



These are not just the big choices but moment by moment decisions to not live in guilt or anxiety, to not allow resentment to rule or anger to alienate. These are the ‘little’ choices to not sulk, not pay someone back by going quiet on them – but to put someone else’s pleasure and interests first. As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle said, ‘It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important’. Those choices, inspired by an attitude that is committed to change, reshape our characters and release the fullness of who we are.



It is important to recognise the power of familiarity. As we were growing up we discovered a place within ourselves from which we could cope with life and make it work. Remember ‘[The Third Room](#)’ in Step One? However, we have learnt that we can move out from mediocre living into fullness of life. We have to leave the familiar and risk feeling vulnerable. Are we used to the background noise of guilt, anxiety or depression?



As unpleasant as all that is – at least we are in familiar surroundings! Moving out from there requires strong choices and holding firm in the face of unfamiliar emotions. We can even experience emotional withdrawal symptoms as the old familiar patterns act like a magnet. It is so tempting to fall back into them because our way of thinking has become a habit. ‘We first make our habits, and then our habits make us.’ (John Dryden). Now we have the chance to develop new habits with good choices. Which way will you go?