

Living in the Almost But Not Yet!

Navigating Life's Transitions

[because today decides tomorrow]

*“Never underestimate the forces that
reinforce complacency and want to maintain status quo.”*

--- John Kotter, Leading Change

*“We desperately need men and women at our side who have
disciplined their minds to think like God:
who God is and what he is doing in and among us;
what it means to be created and chosen by God and how we get in
on what he intends for us.”*

--- Eugene Peterson, The Wisdom of Another

*“We have to acknowledge that our hunger for God comes from him,
and that we will not be completely satisfied on this earth.
The deepest pleasures of this life don't satisfy---they point us forward.*

--- Larry Crabb, Finding God

All over the world, I have asked Christ-followers one simple question:

“What do you want to hear from your Lord at the end of your life?”

Almost without exception, the answer has been the same:

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Their answer is most likely the same one you just recited in answer to that question. “Where is that statement found in The Bible?” The intent of this following question is not shame anyone.

When asking this second question, there is often a moment of silence, then one or two participants will speak up and remind the group that it is from the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:21).

A parable has one central truth. This parable’s truth is often missed. It’s a call to stewardship. Not the stewardship of money but the stewardship of one’s life. Jesus used this story to teach an important Kingdom truth. God entrusts our life experiences, gifts, abilities, and a set amount of days to each of us.

God breathes life into us, each day. His entrustment of life is not about us. His investment into our lives is about His Kingdom. It’s about the expansion of His Kingdom so that we can bring hope and life to others. Our life experiences comprise His entrustment to us. Christ calls each of us to live life as faithful stewards. What has been entrusted to us? Christ has given us His love and grace to invest in others-not to bury.

Sadly, many do bury this entrustment. Many Christ-followers end up living their lives for themselves, burying their precious entrustments in the backyards of self-centeredness. But for the men and women who choose to steward their lives in alignment with how God is already at work, and who make the commitments of servanthood and stewardship, to these Jesus proclaims “well done, good and faithful servants.”

Throughout time people have squabbled over God’s choices. The ten-talent vs. five-talent discussion has been occurring since time began. Jealousy and questions of God’s

sovereign choices are really about us wanting to be in control. Those who choose stewardship make the choices required and head back into the field, returning later with baskets full of a fruit that will remain.

The past and its lessons are often pushed aside. In America, Christ-followers have been trained to hide that which appears negative. The Church often wants to only parrot the success-mantra of the culture. But, stewardship is about investing it all. Lessons we have gained from our failures, as well as times of celebration. We make it all accessible to the King and the harvest. Behind the frustrations and hurts are lessons about God, His character and His grace. These lessons often connect us to the lives of others more than our successes do.

[choices]

It will require a series of choices to hear, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.” The research of Dr. J. Robert Clinton from the lives of leaders who have finished well (found in Hebrews 13:7,8), reveals five choices that are critical if we want to hear those words at the end of our life.

The journey of a Christ-follower will move beyond a time of transition. And as the journey lengthens, the challenges become tougher. The pathways switch from ones of “good and bad (evil),” those of “good and best.” Without the right ropes, clamps and equipment, Kingdom climbers will fall prey to the treacherous cliffs and hidden ice caverns up ahead.

These five choices are tools for Christ-followers who are committed to staying the course. They serve to enhance and strengthen their long obedience in the same direction.

The power of these choices is not in their uniqueness, but in their ability to provide guardrails for the journey. The power of the five choices is in their repeated use, anchoring critical ongoing behaviors, before a new crisis descends.

The choices made today will impact tomorrow. It is the responsibility of Christ-followers to choose each day to submit to the Creator God and place themselves in an environment where God can speak and guide their lives. When Christ-followers in the past have made these choices, they were better able to sustain the challenges of moving up the hill and hearing. “Well done!” They have finished well.

five choices

- *The choice to renew... making the choice to seek after God continuously... an ongoing craving for deeper intimacy with God that becomes your source of strength.*

It’s about choosing to seek God repeatedly and in new ways. It is about making the choice to develop a deep passion and hunger for God. This choice deepens one’s understanding of God and forms character. It is choosing the path of spiritual formation.

For many whose hearts have been seeded with a “once-encounter” view of God, the Christian life is fleeting. Many claim a salvation experience, but do not realize that a genuine life in Christ is re-affirmed as the Lord claim’s your life over and over again. The Christian life can be secure, but it also consists of a series of choices as we move throughout life. The choice to enter into a relationship with Christ is just the first of many choices.

The Christian life is a journey and not a decision card. The essence of what it means to have surrendered to Christ is to follow. Believing is not enough.

Surrender brings renewal. Choices of aligning to Christ and His agenda are often not easy, but the byproduct is a fresh, renewing work of God in the heart of a Christ-follower. These choices must be made repeatedly, at critical junctions in every follower's journey, much like "Traveler" in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

- ***The choice to be a lifelong learner... making this choice will the result in greater growth... refusing to plateau or arrest one's development, resisting the resting on past truth... becoming a Bible-centered Christ-follower.***

The learning choice is one of taking responsibility for one's own spiritual growth and development. It is about maintaining a learning posture, being open to new paradigms, and choosing to use all that is available in terms of the resources around one's self to grow and continually be shaped by Christ.

- ***The choice of perspective ... of re-setting... making the choice to live from a big-picture, lifetime perspective... investing time regularly see life from God's perspective.***

Lifetime perspective is a choice, the choice to regularly reflect and see one's development through God's eyes. Re-setting is learning to regularly access the power of doing a personal time-line. It is the making of choices based upon God's sovereign

shaping of our past. It's about discerning patterns and insights that will assist a believer in seeing life differently.

- ***The choice to allow life to unfold...*** *making the choice to allow God's call on our lives to change... relinquishing the need to control or predict one's future, allowing for a dynamic, enhancing of one's calling and contribution. It's about not withholding our trust in God until He reveals His plans.*

The choice is to remain flexible and allow for an increasing, or unfolding, of God's continual work and the discovery of one's personal destiny.

- ***empowering...*** *making the choice to resource and give of your life to others... and seeking out others to develop you... allowing others to mentor and coach you while giving away what you have to others.*

Mentoring will often require a new paradigm. Most say they want mentoring, but they stay stuck in their view of mentoring. There are at least nine-types of mentors who each can play a key role in developing a Christ-follower's life.

The free Choices Survey is found at www.leaderbreakthru.com/choices. This survey evaluates whether these five choices are really being made. Each choice is explained further, and a series of resources is offered to help you intentionally develop this area of your life.

self-evaluation tool

Choices

The FIVE CHOICES are explained in *Choices* by Terry Walling

Your scores profile your relative strengths and weaknesses in each of the choices. Lower scores help you determine where you the need to focus. Do not base your conclusions on the totals of one choice alone, but look at how the scores of each of the choices compares and relate to all the other choices.

	score	rank
renewing The choice to develop a ongoing passion for God.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
learning The choice to take responsibility for your own spiritual growth and development.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
resetting The choice to allow God to interpret your development through His eyes.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
unfolding The choice to stay fluid in your defining of you calling God allowing to shape you.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
empowering The choice to allow others to help you, and to give your resource to others.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

[embracing uncertainty]

What is really around the bend? We need to admit to ourselves that we don't know. None of us is really quite sure what lies ahead. At best, we are defining what will be (post-modernity) by what it is not (modernity). We need to be honest about what we do not know. This is too critical a time in the history of the Christian movement to throw out more theory, projected trends or idle designs.

Whether intended or not, formula-driven Christianity often produces burned out laborers and a church devoid of true spiritual life and depth. It is little wonder that the younger generation wants little to do with the "boomer brand" of Christianity. The future

is wrapped around intimacy with Christ, not new gadgets and ideas. It's about an authentic Christian life, lived within an authentic Christian community, by Christ-followers who desire an authentic walk with Him.

Times of uncertainty go in step with transitions. The Biblical narrative is strewn with men and women who faced living life in the days of in-between, but not yet. Like ourselves, they faced their challenge to trust in God, and their calls to step into the unknown. Some made choices that aligned themselves with how God was at work (i.e., Abraham, Joseph); and some did not (i.e., King Saul and Judas).

[real lives]

When God spoke to Abraham (Genesis 12), He told him to leave his place of security, promising to lead him to a new home- the Promise Land. His paradigms about himself, God, how God works and what He's after, soon changed. All that was familiar would soon evaporate. All that was left was the character of the Creator God.

When God inserted Ruth and Naomi in their crossroads moment, it was also a transition moment for the nation of Israel. God used these two unsuspecting women to change the tide of faith in a people desperately in need of leadership and belief. "Who knows but that God might have inserted me for such a time as this." (Ruth 4). Destiny and the work of a sovereign God collided, revealing a design for His people far different than they first imagined.

When God confronted the persecutor named "Saul," this sovereign encounter changed more than the name of an oppressor, the landscape of the entire church turned upside down. This tormentor of the church experienced a radical transition and departure

from his former ways. God used the sovereign seeding of Saul's past, to make Paul a minister to the Gentiles. There are many other biblical examples as well.

Eternity runs under the feet of each Christ follower. God has sovereignly chosen to ink each us onto the canvas called today. We have been selected as ones called upon to traverse changing times and uncharted waters. We live in the almost, but not yet. We live in a day when, more and more, we will need to navigate life's transition moments.

Much like the larger transition of the early Church from Jerusalem to Antioch, the center-stage of the church is changing. As the Western-based Church ages and faces the challenges like ethnic diversity, places like Asia, Africa and Latin America are exploding in the Christian faith. America now receives missionaries from other nations. Church attenders in North America are now called to missions in their own culture and cities. And as Abraham gathered family and possessions and departed, so too must those who name Christ as King today. We must face the challenges of new paradigms and new obstacles to being the Church.

The only certainty Abraham had was the character of God. Abraham moved with God, choosing to embrace a life of uncertainty. The Western Church and its members need to do the same. Courageous Christ-followers must gather up their possessions, step out and rely on the character of God.

The boomers have become a generation who profess to believe and trust in God, yet refuse to truly follow him. This lack of surrender and obedience correlates to the lack of God's power in His Church. But in times of uncertainty, God wants to align Himself with Christ-followers who will move into this time of transition, and giving them new

authority and power. His desire is greater than ours, that we each make a lifelong contribution to the expansion of His Kingdom.

The question is not whether God can work in uncertain times, or, whether our lives can have purpose and direction. The question is how bad do we want to know God's unique design and sovereign plan? Are we willing to forsake control and walk through lives transitions so that we can move from the "old country" to a new, Promised Land?

To the men and women willing to navigate their transitions, and follow God into what He desires, the future will unfold. As Christ-followers fall into a life of surrender and obedience, the unknown will become known. The choices of today decide the results of tomorrow.

Need and opportunity do not equate to call. Making key choices, over time, brings discernment to the diversions we each must face. To live out one's unique calling, does not mean a life of ease, but rather a life of true fulfillment. The five choices offer intentional actions that build greater capacities to hear from God and finish well.

"You just have to want to finish well," was the response of one leader in a seminary class that was discussing this topic.

"I mean isn't that the point of what we've been studying?"

"Isn't that why we go through transitions!" he said.

And then he repeated his conclusion again, as if, we had not heard him the first time:

"You just have to want to finish well.

I looked at him and quietly said that he was right.

Then I just told him and the class, what I told myself.

“Want to?”