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## **Growth Questions**

*“To what would you say that you are committed? How have you seen those commitments challenged? Is there an area in your life in which a ‘yes’ to God could expand the boundaries of what you believe to be possible with him?”*

*“How might you respond to a present opportunity (relational, financial, spiritual) which would prevent you from living with regret?”*

*“What circumstance or relationship in your life might need a ‘second look’? Is it possible that what you are seeing is preventing you from seeing? Have you thought about asking God for uncommon sense?”*

*“Would you say that your significant relationships are more or less chaotic due to your responses? In what area of your life might you interrupt the chaos with an orderly response?”*

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## **Teaching Notes**

Several years ago, I came up with at least five things I never heard my mother say, and that you’ll likely never hear your mom say...

- "Wow, how can see the TV sitting so far back?"
- “Honey, drinking all that milk can’t possibly be good for you. Have you ever had a Red Bull?”
- "Seat-belt, shmeat-belt."
- “Hey, you know what we should do later? Bungee jump!”
- "Honestly, honey, the curfew is just a general time to shoot for: 10 p.m., 2:00 a.m. ... let’s not get caught up in all the specifics."

**We live in a culture in which, “*keeping our options open*”, seems to be the highest virtue.**

The paradox in such an approach is that it makes it impossible to choose at all. Our indecisiveness leaves us paralyzed.

Jesus says, in so many contexts and in so many creative ways, that we can’t keep our options open and live a life of any significance or value.

I think we all desire “commitment”: someone to be tenaciously “for” us and something to which we can give ourselves which demands something more of us. Perhaps that is a synopsis of “love”.

## Commitment...

... is not simply the initial “yes”, but demands a series of “yesses” which always narrow our options and fosters a tenacity which will not be easily abandoned.

... is, in a sense, an act of faith. It says that I’m not even sure what the consequences of my “yes” will be, but I will not be deterred in my choice.

... is what ‘preemptive’ obedience. It’s choosing in advance how we will respond. Without it, we face an internal ‘tug-o-war’ with every decision.

... always expects more, but must make room for failure (*“We all stumble in many ways...”* James 3:2).

## Surrender is our first, best response.

Surrender is not to be confused with “indecisiveness”; in fact, it’s the toughest decision that we will ever make. It’s not simply about being “over-powered” by God or throwing up your hands in “resignation” or just “letting life happen to you”, but about taking responsibility for who you are becoming.

By definition, “submission” means ***voluntarily cooperating with the will of another.***

Here’s where our assumptions and initial responses are not helpful:

- **We assume that control is the antidote to stress. We find that worry is connected to fear and fear either debilitates us or activates our frenetic efforts.**
- **We assume that the likely outcome of surrender will be “fear”, for having lost control.**

## Here’s the counter-intuitive nature of the gospel:

First, surrender is the one decision which makes available a power/strength that we can never experience in any other way: the tireless movement of God toward and in us: in a word... ***“grace”*** [James 4:6].

Second, the beauty of surrender is that it doesn’t require a great deal of clarity, only trust.

It’s the settled-confidence which comes as a result of not having to attempt to micro-manage your life and ensure that things work out the way that you had planned. ***We realize that predictability is no longer a pre-requisite for peace.***

This is why God doesn’t seem compelled to spend a great deal of time trying to explain himself or defend his actions, but he does seem to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to convince us that we are loved. [Romans 8:31-39 *“If God is for us...”*] It’s as if Jesus is saying, *“If you really knew me, ...”*

**So, having, first, given ourselves to God, we have to now consistently choose that to which we will give ourselves.**

We spend our entire lives in this process of “evaluation”: attach/fix value to something. This process of is known as “**discernment**”: from the Latin roots of two words: ‘*apart*’ and ‘*to sift*’.

Discernment, then, is the time-honored practice of separating out what is useful and valuable from what is expendable and worthless.

**When we fail to make the connection between our heart, our choices, and the outcome of our lives, we essentially forfeit the ability to live well and destine ourselves to a cycle of foolishness.**

[e.g. vending machine at Costco epitomizes my desired approach: the entire machine is filled with bottled water, therefore, no matter what button you press, you are assured of the same outcome. Not so in life. “**F4**” and “**G6**” will not produce the same outcome.] Paul says, “*don’t be deceived into thinking that you will reap anything other than what you have planted*” (Galatians 6:9)

This is really not just a threat, but a ‘hopeful principle’, because it says that life is not merely about some ‘irresistible fate’, but that we are given a great deal of responsibility for the way that our lives develop.

In the Greek, there are (2) primary words for “time”:

- **chronos** (chronology)- passing time. QUANTITY of time (tick, tick, tick). The passing of which is totally out of our pervuew.
- **kairos** (no English equiv)- unique opportunity. QUALITY of time.

In Greek mythology, “Kairos”, is the god of the really bad ‘comb-over’. **Caerus (seer-os)** is the personification of kairos – the *God of Opportunity, or the God of Fleeting Moments*.

Time is depicted as a man with winged feet and mostly bald with hair only toward the front of his head. **Meaning:** you could grab/seize him as he approached, but once he was by you, you were left staring at opportunity’s bald-spot!

It means that if we have engaged and embraced them, they create for us fond **memories**. If we have ignored/ squandered them, they create **regret**.

The word that Paul uses in the text today is “**kairos**”. It is “opportune” time; present time: not only here (before us), but time to which we are ‘present’ and ‘engaged’.

Kairos is time which is pregnant with both possibilities and regret. It is the opportunity which is seized or lost.

**Discernment means that life is not always as it appears “at first glance”; that life requires a “second look”.**

2 Corinthians 10:7 *“You are looking only at the surface of things.”*

I realized that this summarizes my life: I’m not typically defiant or mean-spirited--- I am just distractible.

**Grace means that every moment of our lives has kairos built into it.**

It’s easy to confuse chronos with kairos (e.g. new car smell, new relationship, new job). Once the newness wears off, you discover that what you thought was kairos was really chronos.

*“Swiss-Army-Knife”* of theology: In every situation--- in every relationship, decision, opportunity--- we are either **“helping to restore order”** or **“contributing to the chaos”** (put things back where they belong). Meaning, our world (sphere of influence/responsibility) is significantly more disorderly or substantially more functional depending upon our response to it.

Paul says that the beauty of the moment is that it’s not too late to be the man, the woman, the father, the mother you wanted to be. *“His mercies begin afresh each morning...”* (Lamentations 3:23)