

Theme: Discerning Life's Choices

Question: How do we recognize those key moments of decision that just might change our life?

Teens and parents in conversation

HomeWord



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Teen Talk

by Maggie Pike

A young man who now admits that he swayed back and forth under the influence of friends for most of his teenage years finally learned—on his own—a valuable lesson:

One day, when I was trying to make a decision, I felt really uneasy because I didn't have anyone to talk it over with. Well, I'll be honest. I was panicking. I always used to do what everyone else thought I should do. But I didn't have any choice this time. I had to decide. So I did; then I worried about it for a week. Some people told me I made the right decision, and others criticized me for it. Then I came to a huge realization: If I had decided in the other direction, I still would have had people tell me I was wrong. I had to go with my best wisdom. Even using that word—wisdom—puts a whole new light on how I see myself.

I really love and admire my dad, but I wish he had taught me differently in one area. He made me think there was a right way of doing something and a wrong way, and I often chose the wrong way, accord-

ing to him. What I finally realized is that there are several right ways of doing just about everything. I think if I had grown up knowing that, I might have been more sure of myself.

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Discernment is the practice of staying in tune with God's direction within. The strength of that inner guidance has the power to transform suffering into growth.

Molly, age fifteen, was devastated when she learned that her friend Jamie had cancer. . . .

I didn't know what to say to Jamie at first. I finally realized that she wasn't my "sick friend"; she was my friend. I also stopped being bummed that all our summer plans were ruined. Our summer plans were just going to be different, that's all. The changes that Jamie's cancer brought weren't as bad as I thought they would be, once I accepted them. Our friendship is so much deeper now because we've shared the experience of her illness. That's a good change. ▼

Parent Talk


by Eileen Pettycrew



At the end of a long day, my young teen careened into my arms sobbing. "Life is so hard, Mom," she said. "I have to make so many decisions."

My daughter had discovered a profound truth. I hugged her and said: "You're absolutely right. Life is hard." Throughout her life, my daughter will face many tough choices, from the little to the life-changing. Will she be able to meet the challenges?

I've learned that discerning life choices means checking in with my heart on a regular basis.



When I was twenty-three—my daughter's age in ten years—I had just completed a master's program in clinical chemistry. Two of my friends who had also earned degrees planned to enter a doctoral program. "Why don't you apply to the program too?" they asked me. "After all," they reasoned, "what will you do with a master's degree? You should go for a doctorate."

Their advice stoked my ego. I knew I could do it. Besides, hitting the job market after years of school felt too threatening. I had no inkling as to what I wanted to do. Should I

teach? Should I work in a laboratory? Having no plans of my own, I let myself be swayed. I applied to the doctoral program and was accepted.

Weeks into the program, questions wrapped around me like a boa constrictor. What am I doing here? Why am I taking biochemistry for the fifth time in a row? Didn't I just study this stuff? Do I want to spend five years in yet another rigorous academic program? What will I do with a doctorate? Both of my friends envisioned themselves as laboratory directors. I had no such desire. What was my career goal anyway? What did I want to do with my life? I had no idea.

The questions applied constant pressure. I tried to wiggle out of their grasp; they only tightened their grip and cut off my air supply. Forced to pay attention, I saw what was in my heart: I did not want to get a doctoral degree. After three miserable months, I withdrew from the program. I was relieved to have finally made a decision, but my string of lifelong choices had just begun. Over the next five ▼

Teen Talk *continued*

Josh remembers [a] time of disorder in his family. He thanks his mother for her lessons in discernment that helped him weather the turbulence:

I noticed the change in Dad when I was eleven. Sometimes I thought he didn't like me because he yelled so much, which he didn't do before. I didn't know anything about midlife crisis, so I took it personally. I do remember him talking to Mom for hours about his horrible job and his equally awful business partner, but I couldn't give sympathy for something I didn't understand. I just wanted him to play around with me like he did before.

I took on his dark moods, but my mom really worked with me through those years. She showed me how I was letting Dad define who I was, rather than defining that myself.

She talked a lot about truth and God and stuff, and sometimes I thought, "Oh, that's Mom and her God-talk again," but her lessons stuck with me. I'm nineteen and starting my second year of college now, and I know who I am. I don't like that feeling of letting other people make me feel a certain way. I make my own decisions—about who I am and about what I do.

Oh, and by the way, my dad is happy again. He's a good guy. But that still doesn't change anything about me. I am who I am.

These teen reflections (italicized) are excerpted from Maggie Pike's forthcoming book, The Power of Discernment: Helping Your Teen Hear God's Voice Within, (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, available spring 2003).

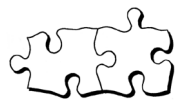


A life's journey is made up of continual daily choices. But there are moments of profound choosing, when a partner, a life-direction, or a new way of being in the world is chosen. This can be a wonderful time of focus and re-direction. When such a moment of choosing is genuine, it is usually preceded by a time of gestation and gathering. Many different strands of your past experience begin to weave together until gradually the new direction announces itself. Its voice is sure with the inevitability of truth. When your life-decisions emerge in this way from the matrix of your experience, they warrant your trust and commitment. When you can choose in this way, you move gracefully within the deeper rhythm of your soul. The geography of your destiny is always clearer to the eye of your soul than to the intentions and needs of your surface mind. . . . The eye of the soul can see in all directions.

John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), page 85

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Write to *HomeWord*, Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1318
E-mail: lkehrwald@smp.org; phone: 800-533-8095



Threshold

When you reach the threshold of young adult life, the world opens up before you. . . . The way might seem uncertain as you wonder how you will negotiate all the changes ahead.

"People can't live with change if there's not a changeless core inside of them," says motivational author Stephen R. Covey. "The key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about and what you value" (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989], page 108). For Christians, God's love provides the foundation for that changeless core. Even when everything else in life seems to be changing, God's love for us remains changeless.

God's special love for each of us, and our ability to respond to that love, is the basis of our human identity. . . . It is this covenant that can serve as our changeless core in times of change.

Clare vanBrandwijk, *Called to Covenant*
(Saint Mary's Press, Winona, MN: available spring 2004)