

What Choice Will You Make?

By Kaitlin Young



I saw it coming. I tried to deny it at first, but there really is no stopping a plan of the Lord's, so it's kind of silly to bury your head in the sand. The numbers were growing, the commentary of doom escalating - it was becoming increasingly clear that the world was on a trajectory of pandemic, life coming to a screeching halt as we know it. Trial was on its way, tribulation about to touch my life – and the lives of everyone around me, with no escape. It had already been a year with challenges and change for me and truthfully, I was tired (scratch that – I still am!) I wish I could say I was such a mature believer that I welcomed this fire that refines gold, but I didn't exactly throw the door open wide and usher in the impending season. At least, not at first.

When the Lord compares our faith to gold that needs to be tested by flame (Job 23:10, 1 Peter 1:7) it's clear that there will be hard things to come. You will not escape hardships in your life. Some will be for you alone, and other times will affect many at the same time. And Scripture makes it clear, these times are for our good (Romans 8:28). This PNW girl just doesn't really like to get that hot. How often would I just prefer to have those fruits of the Spirit imparted onto my soul, without having to persevere for them? And yet, our Father knows what He is doing, and how much sweeter are those fruits, how much deeper the relationship because of the difficult paths we walk.

So, trial has come, and it continues to persist. And as always, I have a choice. In our church counseling ministry, one of the first verses we point people to is Luke 9:23, "And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.'" I must choose, each day, to follow. I must choose Him over me. Whether in season of abundance or season of want, I must make a choice to continue following my Shepherd on the narrow path.

So, do I choose misery in the face of freedoms lost, or do I choose to take joy in the discomfort of this change, because it gives me a lens into the life of many around the world? We live in a country where we have not known much other than freedom, and it never occurs to us to live another way. The reality that this is not the case really hit home as I took my first Global Encounter Trip, years ago, to Kenya. When I spoke to a teacher in the slums who discussed his desire to see the Statue of Liberty with his own eyes, I, with youthful naivety, told him that one day he just might get to! Save more, try harder...oh how the American Dream is interwoven into so many little things we think and do. When I was told by the missionary that this teacher would never get to go, I felt terrible for my comment. He didn't have enough property or family to allow the country to give him an exit. And so he would remain. The idea that someone couldn't just...go...was somewhat foreign to me. For many areas around our world, freedom isn't an option – not just in these times, but ever. For many, worshipping openly is not an option. So, can I choose to see this time as a great blessing that my heart can break for the oppressed, for the lost, and for our missionaries and brothers and sisters in Christ who live like this all the time? Perhaps God is allowing us to have a deeper perspective and hearts focused on things that eternally matter. (Matthew 5:10-12)

Do I choose grumbling and complaining, growing bitter about the increasing number of things canceled or limits to what I can do, or am I grateful for this season that the Lord has given to stop and smell the roses? (Literally, because I now have time to go for a walk each day, and we have some neighbors who are stellar gardeners). Do I choose to see this as a chance to long more for my heavenly home than this broken, earthly one? To see the good gifts He has placed right in front of me, and to give me time to contemplate the things that had a higher importance than they should have? I now have time now to stop and see how the Lord is answering my prayers. I am praising Him for more answers to prayer than I have in a long time – and it's not because He is working more in this season, it's because I finally have the time to see it. Perhaps God is stripping away all of the lesser idols of this world so we can place our treasure in things above. (Matthew 6:21)

Do I choose impatience over things returning to "normal," or do I choose to pause long enough to see what the Lord is teaching me, specifically, in this time? We serve a God who works intricately in all things. Do I trust that if our circumstances continue, it is because He is still doing a good work, in many things big and small? That He is a personal God who hears me and works on my heart and is rooting out in this situation the things that need to grow in maturity still? Perhaps God is working on saving the souls of many in this time, and perhaps He is cleansing yours and mine as well. I want to welcome the purifying process. Hard times hurt, they

genuinely don't feel good – but I do want to enjoy a God who loves me enough in all of this to bring me out on the other side with more perseverance, more character, and more hope – because He is so good to do so. (Romans 5:3-5)

Do I choose to have a heart of selfishness in the things I do, or can I take the opportunity to serve others in new and creative ways? Not going to lie, I've watched some Netflix while eating Oreos a little more frequently than normal (and eschewing all standards of minimizing sugar I once held in parenting by letting my one-year-old take several bites as well) - but it wouldn't be the best use of my time to do this all the time. Whether it is as simple as sending an encouraging text, making a grocery run for the vulnerable, dropping off treats to neighbors living alone with a personal note, writing an invitation to Easter in sidewalk chalk on our driveway, or leaving snacks for our delivery people – how can I appreciate, love, care, and serve those God is placing in my life? I've been blessed to reconnect with a few people I haven't talked to in years, and to encourage and pray for people I only occasionally crossed paths with in the past. I've met new neighbors in abundance to the point I've had to add descriptions of houses in my prayer list to keep them straight. Or, how about the (often) more challenging task of asking how can I serve the people I am living with, now 24/7, seeking to bless them in this time? He is giving us more opportunity to see people as made in His image, and to love them above ourselves (Philippians 2:3)

Do I choose to be stressed about the muddy directives and ever-changing statistics and evidence thrown out by the news outlets or the government? Or am I pleased to know that when our greatest human minds have not yet mastered this virus, our God knows all of it? Down to every last, minute detail, with no sweat off His back. I don't need to be omniscient, I

just need to trust the One who is. Perhaps God is reminding us of who He is, and that we only need to trust Him more. (Isaiah 55:8, Psalm 147:3-5)

Do I struggle with anxiousness of what's to come? Or do I choose to take things one day at a time, repenting of the desire of my heart to have control that is not mine to have and reflecting on a powerful and faithful God who is true to His promises? Can I be honest? This one is hard for me. I wrestle with the not "doing." My instinct is to be Martha, and I love to have things neat and in a perfectly predictable order. That is not the world we live in right now (...or really, ever). Can I be grateful that the Lord is presenting me another opportunity to be Mary, and sit patiently and attentively at His feet? Perhaps the Lord is reminding us of how fragile we are, how fleeting this life is, and yet – He cares for us. (Matthew 10:29, 6:26)

Do I struggle with feeling helpless? Or am I relieved to know that I have no power in and of myself, but God's is beyond sufficient? One of my favorite verses is Habbakuk 3:4 – "...He has rays flashing from His hand, and there He is hiding His power." I think of the enormous thunderstorms I've seen in my life (the Midwest sure has some good ones!), and after the last one that rolled in while in the middle of a village in Uganda, the Lord directed me to this verse as I read through A.W. Pink's "Attributes of God." I love that in the thunder and lightning, wind, hail, sideways rain – He is SO powerful, this is actually a hiding, not a revealing of His power. Our

current circumstances are no match for His power. This virus is nothing for Him. It could end at any moment He so chooses. Look to the examples of Scripture that tell us who our God is, and reflect on His character revealed in your own life. Perhaps God is graciously still showing us His attributes so that we may know Him more and reflect Him more. (John 17:3)

Am I choosing my responses to my circumstances with the aim to be a light in the midst of a dark and crooked generation? Will people see Christ in me as we walk through this? Do I have words of graciousness and compassionate thoughts for those who do not agree with my opinions? Do I allow my preferences (not sin) to dictate my responses to others? Or responding well even if others do not, knowing that I answer to God and not man? (Proverbs 10:13a, 19-20)

...And when I fail at all of the above (let's be real, some days are just hard and I don't rest in the mercies I've been given, my attitude reflecting more often than I'd like, my child's kicking-and-screaming one when she doesn't get her way), do I choose to repent? Do I choose to allow God's grace upon grace touch my heart? Do I choose to remember that He is with me, interceding for me, that He chose life and suffering and understands my struggle? Do I choose to thank Him when He reminds me I am not Him, I am not perfect? That I so desperately need Him? Do I pour out my heart honestly to Him, and watch Him meet me where I'm at, since He knows my heart even better than I do? (1 John 1:9, John 15:5)

The choices are hard. They do not always reflect the emotions I feel, the opinions of others, or the innate selfish desire to satisfy with what is easiest, most comfortable, or is beneficial to myself. It is an active choice, each day and every crossroad moment, to deny me in favor of

doing what brings glory to the Lord. I fall on my face in it. But the Lord graciously picks me up and allows me to step out and choose again.

In this season, this storm is affecting everyone, but it affects everyone differently. Some people have been mildly inconvenienced, and others have had their entire lives upended. Yet the Lord in His sovereignty has each person where they need to be and will walk with them as they navigate the waves. He does not miss seeing you in this, and He will still equip you to choose well. We don't always choose our circumstances, but we have a choice in how we respond to them.

So let us come out of this season on the other side, more refined, and attentive to do our Father's will. Let us desire to be purer. Pray that God will use this season to bring maturity to our faith, and new disciples added to the flock because we've welcomed the hard. May the Church be stronger on the other side of this tribulation as we rest in His strength.

What choices will you make today?

Kaitlin Young

Counseling Ministry

