

# Do You Really Want a Choice?

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*First Sunday of Lent*

DaySpring Baptist Church

February 10, 2008

My friend Randy and I were on the last lap of a 10,000-mile trip in my little 1960-something Toyota station wagon. We had pulled a small pop-up camper due north from Oklahoma up into Canada. It was a college graduation gift we gave ourselves that took us eventually to Halifax before we turned and headed down the east coast. At Washington DC we turned west to make our way back to Oklahoma.

Randy was one the smartest guys I'd ever met. Conversations with him were always challenging and stimulating. On this trip, though, I discovered that he was a much more haunted and anxious guy than I'd ever realized. And not in an off-putting way. His insights into the absurdities of life, and the way existence troubled him just added to my admiration.

Well, the trip had been astoundingly uneventful from a mechanical standpoint, but in Arkansas a tire blew out on the camper. Now, I don't want to promote redneck stereotypes of Arkansas. This flat tire could have occurred anywhere, the service station could have been anywhere, and the young man in question could have been anywhere... but... We pulled into a small greasy gas station. Leaning back against the wall out front was young greasy attendant, about our age. He had a little greasy toothpick in his mouth, and he eyed the station wagon, and then the trailer. After a moment he spoke. "Got a flat?" What I wanted to say was, "Oh... no... the tire on the other side was just suddenly engorged with air, and we've got to do something about it." I didn't say that... I just wanted to say that. The only thing we got out of the guy were vague directions to a local RV dealer. A short time later we were back on our way.

Thinking back to that young man, I commented to Randy, "Wouldn't it be awful to have his life?" Randy's response has stuck with me all these years. He said, "*Sometimes I think the greatest gift in the world would be to never have an original thought.*"

Pray with me.

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable to You, O God, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

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Is it wrong to be curious?

Is it a sin to consider new possibilities?

Should you just be content with the caste into which you've been born?

Are original thoughts simply dangerous thoughts, which should be tossed away like a hot potato?

Many of you, probably most of you, will answer these questions with a resounding NO.

"Curiosity is a good thing", you would say.

"Life would be boring without possibilities to consider."

"This is America... the land of rags to riches."

"Original thinking, the ability to break out of the box, is one of God's gifts"

Really? Then how do you make sense of what happened in the Garden?

Adam and Eve have it made. They live in paradise. They are awash in all the things we believe make life good. They have this very loving connection to God. They have this very loving connection to each other. And

they have meaningful work... enjoyable employment. Who, at one time or another, hasn't wanted to work in a zoo?

And in order to enjoy all of this, they only have to...  
stay in their place...  
do what they've been created to do...  
Not... get... uppity.

And so Possibility slithers in to the Garden, preaching a sermon that could be heard from a million different pulpits on any given Sunday.

“Why are you settling for your lot in life?”  
“Do you really believe that this is all there is?”  
“Can't you see that there's more.... so much more?”  
“Why are you lettin' THE MAN hold you down?”  
“Don't you want to live your best life now?”

We watch the drama, and we root against Possibility,  
No... Eve... don't do it...  
Don't respond to that invitation...  
I don't care how many verses of “Just As I Might Become” they sing.  
Don't walk that aisle.

But it's a good sermon.  
And Eve bites.  
And then Adam bites.  
And it all started with the offer of a new possibility.

Aren't these ancient stories amazing? The more things change the more they stay the same. As far as the day-to-day challenges of existence are concerned, we have virtually nothing in common with the people who were hearing this story for the first time. Those people would be astounded at the comfort and care we enjoy.

Perhaps those ancient people would look at us and say,

“Shoot... if I had everything going for me that those folks have going for them, I'd be the happiest goat in the desert...”  
“I bet those folks never worry about a thing...”  
And they'd be wrong, wouldn't they.

And they would perhaps be shocked that we continue to be so undone by the possibilities we face.

I want more... I need more... If I could just have a little more...

Matthew colors in the lines a bit through the temptation of Jesus  
What if your hunger could be filled?  
What if your insecurities and fears could be erased?  
What if you could have more power?  
What if...?

Are you aware of your hunger needs? You've got them, you know. No one here is starving for bread, but what ARE you starving for?  
Comfort?  
Distraction?

Excitement?  
Esteem?  
Affection?  
Information?  
Knowledge?

Jesus says, *“Only the living Words that flow from the mouth of God will truly fill your hunger.”*

That’s not really very satisfying, is it?

What **other** possibilities are available to fill these needs for you?

Are you aware of your safety needs? You’ve got them, you know, and you direct a fair amount of your resources toward coping with them.

You spend money on a house to protect you...

and perhaps even money on an alarm system.

You spend money on your health, and perhaps on every health craze that comes down the line.

Let’s see... right now are you on...

Low Carbs?

No Carbs?

Good Carbs?

Bad Carbs?

Fish oil?

Almond oil?

Canola oil?

Or do you just prefer a good ol’ 10W-30?

There’s home insurance

Auto insurance

Health insurance

Life insurance

Which of course is really Death Insurance

You can even get insurance for your iPod.

Jesus says, *“Don’t be afraid of what can kill the body. Your Father in heaven is aware of every sparrow that falls to the ground, and He is aware of you.”*

That’s not very satisfying is it?

Surely you can think of some **other** possibilities for filling your safety needs

Are you aware of your power needs? You’ve got them, you know, and you direct a fair amount of your energy toward coping with them.

Which arena kicks up your power needs the most?

Is it your work?

How much energy do you spend trying to control what happens at work?

Is it your marriage?

How much energy do you spend trying to control your spouse?

Is it your family?

How much energy do you spend trying to control your kids?

Sadly, so many power needs get focused on church. Just ask any pastor...

How much of a need do you have to control what happens in this place?

How much anxiety do you have concerning the selection of our next pastor?

Jesus says, *“Now Satan, it’s best to simply worship God, and recognize that He’s the only one who can be trusted with power.”*

Now that’s not very satisfying, is it?

Surely you can think of some **other** possibilities for filling your power needs.

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Some of you know that I'm now into the whole blogging craze. A hundred or so people subscribe to my Practical Spirituality blog, so whenever I post something, those folks automatically get an email letting them know. I decided to use this vehicle to create a cyber-lectionary group. I posted my initial thoughts about the texts and invited responses. I received several, very thoughtful responses, expressing a variety of ideas, and deepening my appreciation for the dilemma that possibilities can generate.

One woman expressed her dread over all the possibilities that would be unleashed when her youngest child headed off to college in a few months. The possibility of an "empty nest" raises annoying questions like, "Who am I when I don't have children around to mother?"  
"Will my husband and I have much to say to each other once the house grows quiet?"

Another friend told me about a painful situation he was observing in which a gifted young man had recently declared his right to turn a possibility into reality, regardless of how destructive it would be for his wife and family.

Several commented on how possibilities, though often invigorating, could indeed seem like just one more opportunity to fail.

However, one idea I had suggested about the passage was affirmed in several of the responses:

***The way I respond to possibilities reveals the state of my soul at the time the possibility is presented.***

Sadly, many times we discover just what *is* the state of our souls in the moments after we bite.

I've been reading this Matthew passage over and over since I was asked to preach today. I've read it over and over... trying to soak in this encounter between Possibility and Jesus...

And then I finally saw that tiny little verse: "***Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting 40 days and 40 nights.***"

It's just sort of thrown in there... Up until I finally saw it, it might as well have read, "***Jesus pulled in to Skinny's for a quart of milk and a pack of Ho Hos.***"

***"Jesus prepared for the Test by... fasting... 40 days... and 40 nights."***

Jesus prepared....

Jesus had to prepare...

40 days... and 40 nights

960 hours

57,600 minutes

3,456,000 seconds

Jesus prepared

to face the possibilities.

And so he was able to face those possibilities  
with peace and power.

Wouldn't it be something if we could do that?

Face life with peace and power,  
instead of with anxiety and reactivity?

Can you imagine what it could be like if just those of us in this room prepared for the resurrection this year?

Can you?

Will you?

Amen.