

Reflection 1: What do you really want for your life?

Frequently, after having worked, parented, made meals, paid bills, played outside, and tucked the kids into bed, my husband and I decide what to do with the remaining hour. There are so many options: get a load of laundry done and clean up the kitchen, play a board game, connect with friends or family, watch a movie we've been saving for a free evening, or just go to bed early. We never have a shortage of options at this stage of our lives. It's time that we would like more of, time to squeeze in one more thing.

Whatever we say yes to, on any given evening, requires us to say no to everything else. Sure, we could choose to play a board game with our neighbours, but it would be rude to do so with the TV on, while paying the bills on our cell phones. And we would not do any of the things well, or really enjoy them, if we tried to do them all simultaneously.

For days on end, we can face each evening without thinking too much about it. We end up doing whatever cries the loudest, opting for laundry when someone is right out of clean socks, the movie when we are not ready for bed but do not feel like doing anything else, and company when it is finally just embarrassing that we have not made time for our people.

In the gospel of John, Jesus tells a parable about how the sheep know the voice of the shepherd, and when they hear his voice, they follow him. What wakes me up from the monotony of one more evening in the middle of one more week is the promise Jesus makes at the end of the parable. While thieves and wolves come to distract and deceive the sheep, Jesus says, "I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

God wants us to have an abundant life, to have a sense of purpose and deep joy. I get so distracted by all the possibilities of this life and tempted to believe that I can have it all, all the time that I end up surviving my life instead of living it, let alone with any abundance. When I stop and listen to the voice of the Shepherd, the God who created us and loves us, I hear an invitation to be still.

In the stillness, it is possible for me to ask myself what I really want out of life. And when I can be really honest with myself, and not be distracted by everything around me, the things I want are really simple. I want more peace, more hope, and more love. I want less frustration and anger, less negativity and despair, and less selfishness and resentment. A new car and a vacation would be great, but they would only fuel a desire for more things;

the truth is that I would give away almost everything I have to get more peace, hope and love. The hard part about this spiritual living, however, is that saying yes to more peace means that I have to work hard at saying no to frustration and anger. Choosing hope means checking my complaining and criticizing while I trade despair for gratitude. Having more love in our home means that I have to let go of my selfishness and ask for what I need instead of expecting others to read my mind. Saying yes to spiritual growth requires me to say no to the habits, attitudes and behaviours that stop me from hearing and following the voice of my Shepherd.

Too often in the church, we keep the focus on saying no. One of the best pieces of advice I received as a parent of young children was to say yes as often as I could. When the kids ask for a snack right after dinner, say, yes, we can have snacks...before bed. When they ask for a treat at the grocery store, say yes, we can have homemade frozen yogurt when we get home. When they ask if I can play, say yes, as soon as I am finished putting the dishes away, and would they like to help so I can finish and play faster? Since I began to practice saying yes to my kids, I have noticed that God often says yes to me too. When I want a life with more love, he says yes and gives me more opportunities to practice loving. God has said yes to more hope and invited me to be more grateful. My longing for peace has been answered with an invitation to stop coasting through evenings, and to choose the things that are the most important and nourishing instead of the things that are the easiest.

Every time that I listen deeply to God, I hear a deep and resounding yes to abundant life. It usually takes me awhile to figure out how to step into it, even just a little deeper. I have never regretted saying yes to what God wants for me.

Choosing to follow Jesus, to be and become a disciple is to allow God to have space in more and more corners of your life.

- What do you really want for your life?
- What do you think God wants for you?
- The Bible tells us that God can "do immeasurably more than all we can ask for or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). Are you ready to give Him more of yourself, and see what He will do in and with you?

This article is the first in a series of four, where we will be exploring what faith invites us to say yes to, in response to God's desire to give us abundant life.