



# ANSWERING GOD'S CALL TO COVENANT

WHICH WAY TO THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?

BY JERRY WINDLEY-DAOUST

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# INTRODUCTION

## JOURNEYING INTO YOUNG ADULTHOOD



**WOULD YOU TELL ME, PLEASE, WHICH WAY  
I OUGHT TO GO FROM HERE?"**

**"THAT DEPENDS A GOOD DEAL ON WHERE YOU WANT TO GET  
TO," SAID THE CAT.**

**"I DON'T MUCH CARE WHERE—" SAID ALICE.**

**"THEN IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH WAY YOU GO," SAID  
THE CAT.**

*(Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland)*

Your high school years are drawing to a close, and young adulthood lies just around the corner. Sometime in the next few years, you will probably find yourself standing at a crossroads like Alice, wondering, "Which way do I go now?" The crossroads of young adulthood often takes the form of life-shaping questions, some of them more obvious than others:

- What career should I pursue?
- What values do I need to hold fast to, and what values can I place a lesser priority upon?
- Where is this romantic relationship going?
- How do I take charge of my life?
- What does my faith look like, and what role will it play in my life?

As the Cat pointed out to Alice, your answer to these crossroads questions will depend on where you want to go in life.

## ↳ THE CALL TO COVENANT

This book was written to help you think about the question “Where do I want to go in life?” before you encounter the crossroads of young adulthood. Poor Alice could ask only a smart-aleck cat for direction; this book proposes that you consult a wiser guide.

More than three thousand years ago, God called the Israelite people to set out on a journey toward a richer, happier life. That journey was not without uncertainty or danger, but the people had an unfailing guide: “The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night” (Exodus 13:21). As the people began their journey, God made a Covenant with them: God promised always to guide and protect them if they would promise always to follow God.

As you begin the journey into adulthood, God calls you to a rich and happy life, too. Like the Israelites, you are called to enter a covenant with him (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 357): God will light the way to a happy life if you choose to follow him.

## ↳ ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book sets out seven crossroads questions that you will probably encounter in the next five years, and it invites you to consider your response in light of God’s call to covenant:

1. **HOW WILL I RESPOND TO CHANGE?**
2. **WHO DO I WANT TO BE?**
3. **HOW WILL I FIND HAPPINESS?**
4. **HOW WILL I FIND LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP?**
5. **WHAT WILL I TAKE WITH ME?**
6. **WHAT PATH WILL I CHOOSE?**
7. **WHICH WAY TO THE REST OF MY LIFE?**

Such foundational questions may seem less pressing when you are faced with other more immediate and practical concerns. But the questions are important crossroads questions because the way you answer them will influence the way you respond to the many practical questions of young adulthood—and more important, where you end up as an adult.

Each of the first six chapters of this book follows a similar three-part format:

🕒 **THE QUESTION.** The first part of each chapter briefly explores the crossroads, or focus, question of the chapter. The first part of the chapter also provides some space for thinking about how you might answer the question now, in light of your current thought and experience.

🕒 **THE COVENANT.** This section looks at how Christian faith answers the chapter focus question in light of the Covenant that God established with the Israelites and renewed through Jesus Christ. That Covenant (capital C) forms the basis for the personal covenant (lowercase c) to which God calls you.

🕒 **YOUR RESPONSE.** Once you have considered how your faith responds to the chapter focus question, you are invited to consider prayerfully how you want to live your response to the question as a young adult.

Throughout each chapter, a handful of reflection questions will invite you to explore the chapter focus question from different angles. The purpose of these reflection questions is not to test your knowledge of the chapter content; rather, they are meant to give you time to really think about where you want to go in life. Think of your responses to these questions as a kind of road map for your journey into young adulthood.

Record your responses to these questions, along with any other thoughts or reflections you might have, in a notebook or journal. (Or, if you prefer, you could make an audio or video recording of your responses for later reference.) Space is provided in this book for your initial response or notes. It is important that you record your responses to the reflection questions because in the last chapter, you will review those responses to create a covenant statement, a kind of personal mission statement made in light of the Covenant. The purpose of that statement is to make a commitment to God and yourself about the basic direction you want to take in life; as you face the changes and challenges of the next few years, that covenant statement can serve as a resource.



## LIVING THE QUESTIONS


Finally, a word of caution: it would be a mistake to imagine that you can or should answer the questions in this book completely and finally. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke offers appropriate advice:

**BE PATIENT TOWARDS ALL THAT IS UNSOLVED IN YOUR HEART AND TRY TO LOVE THE QUESTIONS THEMSELVES LIKE LOCKED ROOMS. . . . DO NOT SEEK THE ANSWERS THAT CANNOT BE GIVEN YOU BECAUSE YOU WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO LIVE THEM. AND THE POINT IS, TO LIVE EVERYTHING.**

*L***IVE THE QUESTIONS NOW,  
PERHAPS YOU WILL THEN GRADUALLY, WITHOUT NOTICING IT, LIVE ALONG SOME DISTANT DAY INTO THE ANSWER.**

*(Letters to a Young Poet, p. 35)*

To “live the questions” is not to avoid them or to treat them as unanswerable. Rather, to live the questions is to remain hopeful that, as you make your way through life by the light of God, your responses will become ever deeper and wiser.

With that in mind, let’s begin living the questions and start on the journey through the countless possibilities before you. Waiting on the other side is your unique covenant with God. 

# HOW WILL I RESPOND TO CHANGE?

## ↳ THE QUESTION

### ON THE THRESHOLD OF LIFE

I was filled with melancholy the other day. I had spent such a wonderful night camping with my friends. Yet it hit me when I was talking to one of my friends. There we were on the swing looking at an impressive sunrise, and I wondered, "Who knows how many more times I will see him?" College will begin pretty soon and I will meet new people and my relationship with him will suspend. I will change, he will change, and each time we get together again we will be more distant. It seems as if I will be living in two different worlds—the friends I have in college will have no idea of my life at home or vice versa. I will be a person living within many realms, trying to maintain relationships with people so far away, being separated, coming back, changing. (Clémence Sullivan)

I thought about what I really wanted. . . . One part of me wanted to have a good, normal job, and a good education, and the other wanted me to do something outrageously fun for my life, and to hell with money and education and stability. (Jason Longo, in *Our Boys Speak*, p. 116)

My time is up here. Four years of my life have been filled with joy, security, and self-confidence. But now all I see is uncertainty. A whole new world is waiting for me, but with no direction it seems. My path is unclear, and I am afraid I will choose the wrong road. The time is approaching when I will have to depend more and more on myself—and I'm unsure how to handle this. Do I worry? Should I be nervous? Who will help me? (C. C., in *Turn Into the Wind*, p. 80)




Do any of these voices sound familiar? Like you, these young people are coming to the end of their high school years. They're starting to think about life after high school, and those thoughts bring on a wide range of feelings: excitement about the freedom and potential of young-adult life, worry about new and unknown challenges, sadness or even grief at saying good-bye to friends and a comfortably familiar way of life.

All these feelings are normal for people whose lives are undergoing great change—and no doubt, leaving your teenage years and entering young adulthood involves great change. Just think about everything the young people quoted above will probably experience in the five years following their high school graduation:

- saying goodbye to old friends and making new ones
- leaving their family homes to live on their own
- choosing a career path and getting a job
- managing their own finances
- assuming the rights and responsibilities that come with legal adulthood
- entering into romantic relationships

In short, these young people are about to enter one of the most change-filled periods of their lives. How will *you* respond to the changes of this upcoming period?

#### PAUSE TO REFLECT

- A. Start by thinking of the big changes and transitions you have already experienced in your life—for example, a move to another school or city, the death of a friend, the start of a new job, or the beginning of a new relationship. The way you handled these transitions offers some clues about how you might deal with the transition into young adulthood. Do you tend to embrace change, resist it, or a little of both? What do you think you handled well about these transitions, and what would you do differently now if you could do them over?
- B. Make a list of the changes you expect to encounter in the next five years or so (you can use the list above for ideas). After each change, write a little about how the change makes you feel (sad? excited? indifferent?) and why. 

LIVING THE QUESTIONS

Lined writing area for journaling.

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE



## ↳ THE COVENANT

No one can tell you exactly what to expect on the journey into young adulthood. Fortunately, though, others who have been through major life changes can help you prepare.

### THREE STAGES OF CHANGE

William Bridges, author of the book *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, believes that major life transitions come in three stages.

**Endings.** All changes begin with endings; an old chapter of life must come to a close before a new chapter of life can begin. Endings involve letting go of an old way of life—the social roles (for example, student, teammate, baby-sitter) and routines (studying, doing family chores, hanging out with high school friends) that fill our days. And to the extent that we define ourselves according to our daily activities and social relationships, ending these things also means letting go of our old identity, our sense of who we are.

**The desert.** After their old life has ended, but before they are totally adjusted to their new life, many people experience a time of emptiness and loneliness—maybe even a sense of being a little lost. They've left familiar routines and roles behind but haven't really established new ones yet. The Christian saints and mystics compared this in-between place to a desert. Most people who find themselves in the empty, lonely space of the desert want nothing more than to get out—the sooner, the better! But in the Christian tradition, the emptiness of the desert is often where people encounter God and undergo great transformation.

**Beginnings.** On the outside, beginning a new way of life is about adjusting to new social roles (such as new friends, a different relationship with parents) and new routines (doing your own laundry and grocery shopping, for instance). On a deeper level, beginning a new way of life means coming to a new understanding of who we are.

This pattern of change applies equally well to the transitions we welcome (like going to college) and to those we resist (like the end of a relationship). Whether we view the changes in our life as “good” or “bad,” a key question is how to deal with those changes in a healthy, life-

giving way. A lot of people try to control change to reach a good end, which makes sense. If we have to get a job, for example, we may as well choose the best one available. But sooner or later everyone encounters changes they can't control. What then?

We may not always be able to control life's changes. But we can control how we *respond* to those changes.

## TWO STORIES FROM THE DESERT

Two biblical stories offer wisdom for anyone facing transition and change. The first story describes the Israelites' transition from slavery to freedom; the second describes Jesus's transition from private life to public ministry.

### ISRAEL IN THE DESERT

The story of the Exodus opens with the Israelites living in Egypt as slaves. They cry out to God for an end to this way of life; God hears their plea and chooses Moses and Aaron to lead them to a new life in a better land, the Promised Land. God frees the Israelites by leading them safely through the waters of the sea. They are overjoyed to see their old way of life come to an end—at least, at first they are.

Before they can reach the Promised Land, though, they must pass through the desert. God travels with them, going before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (see Exodus 13:21). Along the way, God claims them as his people and calls them to enter a sacred Covenant with him:

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." (19:4–6)

"Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do," the people respond (19:8). In the ancient world, a covenant was a solemn, binding agreement between two persons or groups. The Ten Commandments enumerated the basic obligations of the Covenant—love of God and neighbor.



Given the promise of God's constant care, it should have been easy for the Israelites to leave the desert to begin their new life in the Promised Land—but it wasn't. Again and again, they failed to trust God. First, they didn't trust God to feed them in the desert; they even longed for their old life in Egypt, where there was plenty of food to eat (see Exodus 16:3; Numbers 11:4–6). Then, they thought Moses and God had abandoned them, and they built a golden calf to worship instead of God (see Exodus 32:1–6). Finally, they wouldn't enter the Promised Land because they didn't trust that God would help them overcome the enemies who blocked their way. Again they longed for their old way of life: "Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" (Numbers 14:3). Again and again, God renewed his Covenant with the people despite their lack of trust.

The Israelites' story is a very human one. It's the way most of us handle life's transitions—bumpily, with fits and starts and moments of doubt. When this is our experience, it's important to remember that God never abandoned the Israelites, even when they abandoned God.

### **JESUS IN THE DESERT**

The story of Jesus's transition from his old, private life as a carpenter to his new life of public ministry bears some resemblance to Israel's story. Like Israel, Jesus left his old life by passing through water when his cousin John baptized him. The Spirit led Jesus, like Israel, into the desert. But look at how he responded to this time in the desert differently than did Israel:

☪ Like Israel, Jesus was hungry in the desert. But when Jesus was tempted to turn a stone into bread, he responded, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'"

(Matthew 4:4)

☪ When the Israelites lost their trust in God, they made a golden calf to worship instead. But when Jesus was tempted to worship Satan in exchange for worldly power, Jesus answered, "It is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.'"

(Matthew 4:10)

☪ Israel hesitated to enter the Promised Land because the people didn't trust that the Lord would keep them safe. But when Jesus was tempted to test the Father's care for him, Jesus responded, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Luke 4:12).

All of Jesus's responses have a common element: he trusted the Father to carry him safely through the desert. God will carry us safely through the desert as well, if we have the same kind of trust Jesus had.

## YOU IN THE DESERT

Just as Israel and Jesus had to go through the desert to get to a better life beyond, you too will probably find yourself in the stillness, silence, and emptiness of the desert at some point in the next few years. But as the stories of Israel and Jesus affirm, the desert isn't necessarily something to be feared. It was in passing through the desert that the Israelites rediscovered a new identity as God's Chosen People, and it was in the desert that Jesus's identity as the Son of God was revealed (see Matthew 3:17, 4:3). It is the same way with each of us during times of transition and change. When our days are stripped bare of the roles and routines that normally distract us, the resulting emptiness creates more space for God's transforming presence to enter our lives.

Instead of being afraid of transitions, we can ask: "How is God present in this time? What kind of new life and identity might God call me to during this time of change?"

Those who follow Christ can enter any time of transition and change with confidence, because he has already gone through the greatest transition of all—the passage from death to new life. And by virtue of our baptism, we have already traveled through the desert of the Passion with him.


By participating in Jesus's death and Resurrection through Baptism, we died to our old selves and were reborn into a new identity, one in which we became God's "adopted" children. We can hear the words that God spoke to Israel as if they are spoken to us: "You shall be my treasured possession."

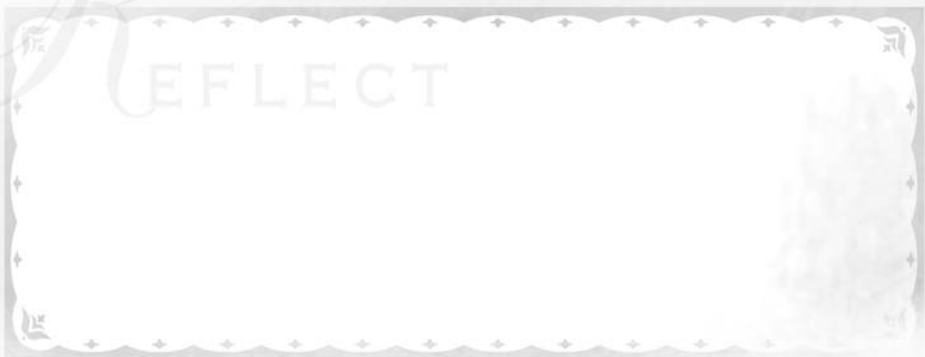
Trusting that Jesus will carry us safely through the desert of change doesn't mean we won't falter, like Israel. Nor does it mean the way will



be easy. Jesus trusted his Father completely yet experienced fear (see Mark 14:32–36) and even a sense of abandonment (see Mark 15:34). Rather, trusting Christ means remembering that no matter what life throws at us, God’s love has already triumphed. If we’ve already been to the grave and back with Christ, what can stand in our way?

### PAUSE TO REFLECT

- C. Consider how Jesus and Israel were tempted to turn away from God in the desert. As you leave your teenage years and high school life, what temptations do you think you will face? It might help to recall the temptations you faced at other “desert times” in your life.
- D. As the Israelites traveled through the desert, God’s presence was visible to them in the form of a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. How has God been present in your life, especially during times of change and challenge? If you have not noticed God’s presence, think of a time of change or challenge and imagine how it might have been different if you had been aware of God’s presence with you. 



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