

Voices: So your life is being sifted—how Christlike

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A couple of weeks ago, the *Houston Chronicle* published a story about the aspirations of this year's Miss America contestants. These ambitious young women are training for all kinds of careers, but one hopeful's description stood out. She wants to anchor "Good Morning, America," become a world famous cake decorator and win "American Ninja Warrior." Pick a lane, Miss Ohio!



Ellen Di Giosia I know that sounds harsh, but I recently had a birthday that places me firmly in the mid-40s, and there's no cure for it. I no longer can deny I have entered middle age. It's time to accept that I probably am not going to be president of the United States. If I did somehow manage to win a federal election, I probably would not also perform life-saving surgery on puppies and win a Tony Award.

In the glow of youth, becoming a Broadway star and serving as leader of the free world might seem like compatible goals. But at midlife, choosing a path seems a wiser decision.

The "midlife transition"

So, a midlife crisis would be right on schedule. (I don't think I'm having one, but, unlike me, the year is still young.) Counselors and therapists prefer to call it the "midlife transition" these days, in order to distance a normal developmental task from the stereotype of a man getting hair plugs and buying a Corvette.

The word "crisis" is apt, however. As with many English words, its etymology takes a winding path through Greek and Latin. Look back far enough, and you find a Latin root that means "to sieve." In any crisis, all the information and all the emotions get dumped into one bowl. The task of the crisis-haver is to sort through all of this to decide what matters and what doesn't.



On the aforementioned birthday, I received what may be the best card of all time. The front of the card says, "Once upon a time, a very special person was born who was destined to change the world." (Aww.) Inside: "Calm down. It's not you. It's Jesus. I think he'd want you to have a happy birthday, though." (Oof.)

So then I'm not headed for global greatness?

Time for jostling

While the young Midwestern beauty queen dreams of a trifecta of fame, I'm pouring half a lifetime of hopes, plans and just plain whims into the pot. It's time to jostle the whole thing—gently, so very gently—in the hopes that the things that are not important will shake out. What's leftover will determine where I put my energy. It's time to admit I can't do everything. I'm not Jesus, after all.

Of course, Jesus didn't do everything, either. I don't want to be branded a heretic, so I won't suggest Jesus had a midlife crisis. It does seem, though, there was a moment of sifting—a point at which he had to step into a new

way of living. After he was baptized by John, Jesus followed the Spirit's leading into the desert to sort through the motives and means that could define his ministry. The tempter presented lovely choices, food for a starving soul.

Satisfy the people's hunger alone? (Sift, sift, sift until this idea falls away.) Become a wonder worker? (Shake the pot until that one drains out.) Pledge your allegiance to worldly power? (Turn the crank and watch it disappear through the screen.)

After the temptation ...

Each temptation fell through the cracks of Jesus' fingers like sand, until the only things left were Jesus himself and the kingdom he preached. Having stared down the adversary and sorted through the options, he walked back into civilization and got to work.

How do we approach a time of sifting? When we're thrown into the pot with all our desires, our challenges, our hard choices, the shaking feels as if it could be measured on the Richter scale. We are tempted to grab everything within reach, only to find it all slips through our grasp, leaving us with nothing that really matters.

Perhaps we start by going willingly into the desert with Jesus, letting the Spirit sweep us into reflection and surrendering to the passing of time. Bracing ourselves against the tremors might help us to survive, but we will miss the opportunity and excitement of finding what God has prepared for us.

It isn't the easy choice, but even Jesus had to choose the better way.

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