EVERYDAY DISCERNMENT

2004 KAI: Should I buy tickets to the Ace of Base Reunion concert? Better not tell you now? Should I just save my money? Reply hazy? OK. God, if you're listening, just speak to me. Give me a sign. But how I do I know that was the sign? How do I know?

KAI: Hi. I'm Kai.

LIBBY: And I'm Libby. Welcome to Catholic Central.

KAI: Have you ever been cruising along in life until suddenly you find yourself at a crossroads?

FRANTIC LIBBY:

More like life is a constant series of crossroads with infinite possibilities, and choosing one path is excluding all others and there's no possible way to tell which path is the best one.

KAI: OK, then. Well, the good news is that the Catholic Church has some advice for how to make good decisions.

LIBBY: In what is hopefully a calm and peaceful way.

KAI: First off, we can all rest easy knowing that God has a plan for each of our lives and wants to help us discover the fullness of life.

LIBBY: Jesus said, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." John 10:10.

KAI: In our episode on “The Purpose and Meaning of Life,” we talked about how to discern the big picture for yourself.

FRANTIC LIBBY:

OK. But forget about the purpose of life. I've got my hands full making 10,000 tiny choices a day. I counted.

KAI: Right. So, how do you make those small everyday decisions? The first step is to determine whether all of your options are even morally good.

LIBBY: God will never call us to do bad things, even if it's to achieve a good result.

KAI: So, while you could justify stealing your roommate's car in order to impress the love of your life, that's not what God's asking you to do.

LIBBY: Assuming we've prayed about it, and the options we're looking at are good, what's next?

KAI: Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, had a process called discernment of spirits.

LIBBY: Saint Ignatius believed that there were good and evil spirits trying to influence the choices we make.

KAI: But even if you don't want to think about physical spirits buzzing around you, everyone has felt the feelings that he believed the spirits stir up.

LIBBY: Those are the feelings of consolation and desolation. Consolation is a peace in moving closer to God, that feeling that you're on the right path. You feel like you are growing in good qualities like kindness, mercy and hope.

CONSOLATION LIBBY:

I feel so alive and so grateful to feel alive. Love is everything. Everything is connected. I'm free.

KAI: And desolation is the opposite, moving away from God. You feel cut off from God's love, and you're growing in bad qualities like selfishness, doubt, or fear. Things are not OK.

DESOLATION KAI:

I'm in constant turmoil. What if I'm worthless and incapable of doing anything right? I feel trapped. I hate everything, including myself and everyone else.

LIBBY: The important thing to note is that we're not talking about mere happiness and sadness.

KAI: Right. You can be sad about something that happened, but still generally feel at peace, loved by God and sure that you have a purpose in life.

LIBBY: Or you can feel happy in the moment but empty inside.

KAI: This is more about the feelings deep inside your soul.

LIBBY: And unfortunately, it's not as simple as what feels good or bad.

KAI: Sometimes the thing we need the most doesn't feel that great at the time like work, exercise, or tattoo removal.

LIBBY: And something bad can make us feel great in the moment but ultimately harm us like impulsively getting a tattoo you later regret.

KAI: Yeah.

LIBBY: I have five.

KAI: And then there are the expectations of others. While it's important to get advice from people we trust, it becomes a problem when we base our decisions on the fear of how our choices will be judged by others.

LIBBY: Because frankly, sometimes God called the saints to do weird and scary things that didn't make any sense to the people around them.

KAI: Right. Yet, most of us choose to give more weight to what others want of us than what God wants.

LIBBY: That's not even getting into our own selfish desires.

KAI: Yes. A choice that you make because you think it'll lead to fame, riches, or being able to manipulate someone into falling in love with you is probably not the right one to make. Lesson learned.

LIBBY: Instead, you can look at the pros and cons of a decision. Ask yourself what the impact would be on you and those around you, whether it leads closer to God or farther away from him, and what your motivation truly is.

KAI: Meaning, is the choice coming from a place of truth and love or selfishness, fear, or the desires of other people?

LIBBY: Will making the choice be a step towards the person you would be if you were free from the things that hold you back and didn't care what other people thought?

KAI: Picture yourself at the end of your life. How do you feel about the decision?

OLD KAI: Ace of Base.

KAI: OK. That exercise doesn't work all the time. And keep in mind that maybe you don't have enough information yet to fully make a decision. It's OK to wait and see what God might be communicating about it.

FRANTIC LIBBY:

OK. But what if something that seems unimportant starts a chain reaction and I end up homeless because I bought the wrong toothpaste?

KAI: It sounds like you are wrestling with some anxiety.

FRANTIC LIBBY:

You think?

LIBBY: OK. Once again, assuming your options are morally good, there really isn't any way to predict the outcome of a choice.

KAI: That could be why Jesus tells us, "Do not worry about tomorrow." Worrying about the future makes it harder to hear God speaking to us in the here and now.

LIBBY: God calls us to live and move and have our being in the present moment and won't ask us to choose based on hypothetical circumstances that might not even happen anyway.

FRANTIC LIBBY:

But then what about after you make a decision and you still don't know and you're left wondering forever if you did the right thing?

KAI: First of all, let's all take a deep breath.

LIBBY: Next, remember that some decisions are neutral and don't matter all that much in the long run no matter how stressful they may seem at the time.

KAI: If you find yourself still worrying about a decision you made...

LIBBY: Or an action you didn't take.

KAI: It might be a healthy sense of guilt, which is like having an ache in your soul.

LIBBY: Just like pain can indicate problems in your physical body, guilt can point to things we should stop.

KAI: Or motivate us to go from doing nothing to doing what we know we should do the next time that the situation comes up.

LIBBY: But where you might feel guilt about something you did, shame is something you feel about yourself and is never a good thing.

KAI: Shame makes us think that we are never going to be good enough and that we can never change.

LIBBY: Catholics believe that every person has been created good, and that there is no one that is beyond forgiveness and redemption.

KAI: So, even if you mess up, God's love, forgiveness, and mercy are always there for you.

LIBBY: And each mistake is an opportunity to learn and grow.

KAI: And I don't know about you, but I'm feeling a lot of peace about ending this episode.

LIBBY: I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Thanks for watching Catholic Central.

LIBBY: Check out our website at CatholicCentral.com for more resources on discernment.

KAI: And for help with figuring out decisions, subscribe to us on YouTube and look for our episodes on “The Meaning and Purpose of Life” and “Formation of Conscience.”

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