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Either/Or

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Either/Or

If we eat the piece of candy, it is gone. If we keep it in the box, we do not taste it. Sometimes we find it effortless to choose between having our cake and eating it. At other times, we experience great distress in choosing one particular path in life, especially if it excludes another.

In our minds, we can ponder the pros and cons of an issue to the point of getting a headache, and still not arrive at a solution. Perhaps we are attracted by two alternatives, but can have only one. Or, we might be caught between a choice that will be pleasing to one person who is important to us, but displeasing to another. Thinking and reasoning cannot, by themselves, bring us to a satisfactory decision. The desires of our hearts, the memories of hurts and successes, the feelings that are directly connected with some of our thoughts – these too must be considered when it is time to make a decision.

If we are in a trusting relationship with God, we can seek guidance in choosing or rejecting a value, an attitude, or a belief. But if we are not comfortable trusting God to help us, how might we make a wise decision, one that has possibly major consequences?

We do not have to understand how it is that we have an “honesty compass” within us, as long as we are willing to rely on our inbuilt sense of integrity. We can evaluate various levels of information properly if we equivalently remove from around our “compass needle” all the sources of magnetism that would deflect it in the wrong direction.

Identifying the various influences at work on our truth-seeking heart is very helpful. Is it hurt, anger, fear, or confusion, or a number of feelings within that bring about confusion and a sense of struggle? Take the movements one at a time, and give them names that seem appropriate. Grief, sadness, disappointment, frustration, rage, or affection – there are a limited number of influences, strong as each or any one of them might be. We do not want to be pushed by any one of these into accepting an attitude, belief, or personal value. “Naming is taming:” When we gain some understanding of the influences acting on us from within, we can much more readily sense which direction to choose.

Sometimes our most difficult choices involve our relationship with God. What are we willing to believe? What do we choose to believe? We might be so involved in experiences of suffering that we consider the

possibility that either there is no God, or God is not good. For those who have previously had some positive experiences of God, there is a double or added dimension to their suffering when they seriously consider giving up their belief in God as good. Within the thought lies the lie, and the possible resolution: to notice the added dimension of pain and disjunction that accompanies it.

Our inbuilt "honesty compass" helps us to recognize how one particular thought increases the level of internal disturbance. That thought does not serve us well; it is not "on our side;" it has the signs of destructiveness about it. The back side of a magnetic compass points directly away from "true North." Try the opposite thought, and note carefully the accompanying feelings, which might resonate with our spirits, and "fit" better than the previous thought. Even if we do not experience a complete resolution to all our pain and confusion, we are very likely to sense that, with regard to the one thought under consideration, we now recognize which direction is in our favor. A thought that is not in keeping with our deepest values will bear with it some feelings of disturbance and pain; a thought that is in accord with our most important truths will carry with it an internal sense of peace or "this is right."

One of the greatest sufferings in life is to be torn between two choices. The more significant the decision, the greater the pain, until we determine the direction of one thought as either matching or being out of synch with our heart. When we recognize and choose that which is more caring of us, we will usually find that our conclusion is quite in accord with reason as well as with spirit.

If we are able to say to ourselves with honesty that God is good, even though we and others suffer grievously, we will probably find it rather easy to explain the presence of our "internal compass" as a particular manifestation of God's love. We did not invent ourselves, but we are, for all that is weak about us, wondrously made. Concerning this thought, as well as any other that is of concern to us, we have the capacity to decide: either/or.