

POD Teaching Session 1 Module C

Is Growth a Decision? An Act of the Will?

Learning Objectives:

- Understanding more clearly the interaction between my will and that of others.
- Gain the skill to work by working with “Negative Capability.”
- Become skilled at living in the Middle Voice “The Rosetta Stone of Christian being”
- Learn the art of true Intimacy: “Willed Passivity”

Taken from Eugene H. Peterson’s book, “The Contemplative Pastor”
Chapter 9 Is growth a decision; A great topic to explore further in your POD community discussion groups. **Refer to the Resource Guide for the article under the same title.**

The question at the heart of the intersection of God’s will and human will is apparently at the heart of everything. The relation of God’s will and my will is not a specialized religious question: it is the question. The way we answer it shapes our humanity in every dimension.

Two approaches to the will.

1. “The breaking of the will”: Your experience?

2. “Exercising my will” = The capacity of my will to determining the direction of my life:
How’s that working for you?

In the gospel of divine grace, what place does the human will play? Does our will only get in the way? What is left for our will?

begin exercising my will, I find that I have put a fox in charge of the chicken coop.

My will is my glory; it is also what gives me the most [trouble](#). There is something deeply flawed in me that separates me from the God who wills my salvation; that “something” seems to be located in and around my [will](#).

Ponder Rom 7:15: I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hateand (Mt. 26:39) I pray with my Lord, “Not as I will but as thou wilt”.



“To will or not to will that is the question”

As you look at the mystery of life there are always wills other than your own involved in ways that defy simple alternatives of either asserting your will or acquiescing to another will. This plays out every day in your work, in your language and how you love. So, as you experience life, read books, pray, and ponder; answers to the greatest mystery of all begin to emerge: about God and your relationship to Him in prayer and belief and obedience.

Obedience is at the heart of love and answering the call of God

**Let’s explore the interaction of our will and that of another in
Work, our Language and Love:**

➤ **Work: Negative Capability**

Real work, whether it involves making babies or poems, hamburger or holiness, is not self-expression, but it’s very opposite. Real workers, skilled workers, practice negative capability (the suppression of self so that the work can take place on its own). This is so our work is as little adulterated or compromised by our [ego](#) as possible. Emptying is the prelude to filling.

Philippians 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. NASB95

John 3:30 “He must increase, but I must decrease. NASB95



2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. NASB95

**A bucket, no matter what wonderful things it contains, is of no use for
the next task at hand until it is [emptied](#): Negative capability.**



I will to not will what I am already good at in order that what is more than me and beyond me, the will of God, can come into existence in my willing work.

Your comments/thoughts:

➤ **Language: The Middle Voice** (The rosetta stone of biblical being and prayer)

In the English language there are Active and Passive verbal forms but Koine Greek, as well as in other languages, includes a Middle voice. Over the centuries the use of the Middle voice in language has all but disappeared.

Active Voice: I initiate an action that goes someplace else: “I counsel my friend”

Passive Voice: I receive the action that another initiates “I am counseled by my friend”

Middle Voice: I actively participate in the results of an action that another initiates: “I take counsel”

The Middle voice is that use of the verb which describes the subjects as participating in the results of the action

Most of our speech is divided between active and passive; either I act or I am acted upon. But there are moments, and they are those in which we are most distinctively human, when such a contrast is not satisfactory: two wills operate, neither to the exclusion of the other, neither canceling out the other, each respecting the other.

I enter into the action begun by another, my creating and saving Lord, and find myself participating in the results of the action. I neither do it, nor have it done to me; I will to participate in what is willed.

Ephesians 4:22-24 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside* the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed (passive) in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and



holiness of the truth. NASB95

Colossians 3:9-10 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside* the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— NASB95 *Aorist, middle voice, infinitive



Romans 6:11 Even so consider** (Reckon KJV) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. NASB95 ** Present tense, middle voice, imperative (command)

Today our languages have lost the middle voice, save by forms which have lost all distinction of meaning. At the origins of our language there was no passive voice; only active and middle. The further we travel for Eden, the less use we have for the middle voice. Eden pride and disobedience delete the middle and reduce us to two voices, active and passive.

How would the loss of the middle voice lead to pride and disobedience? _____

We do not have enough experience with this middle voice, this voice that is fine-tuned to the exquisitely and uniquely human venture of entering into and responding to God. But no friendship, no love affair, no marriage can exist with only active and passive voices.

The gospel restores the middle voice. We learn to live with praying-willing involvement in an action that we do not originate. We become subjects in an action in which we are personally involved.

Therefore we are not fascists barking orders to God and his creatures. At our human and Christian best we are not quietists dumbly submissive before fate instead we pray in the middle voice at the center of active and passive, drawing from them as we have need but always uniquely and artistically ourselves, creatures adoring God and being graced by him, “participating in the results of the action.”

My best advice is to meditate upon the insightfulness of the middle voice! it is like a new way of thinking about the world. And it is indeed profound!

➤ **Love: Willed Passivity**

In Marriage and friendships two wills are operating at the same time. In marriage once the

ecstasies diminishes what was experienced initially as a gift must be developed as an art. The art is willed passivity.

Most of what we have experienced in life is in the mode of passivity. We enter into what is already there before we exercise our will. Nothing we do by the exercise of our wills will ever come close to approximating what is done to us by other wills.

What are some of these “passivities”?: weather, our bodies (genetics), much of government, the landscape, much of our education, the food chain,, our parents, the dog etc.

There are two different ways of being passive: there is an indolent, inattentive passivity that approximates the existence of a slug; and there is a willed and attentive passivity that is something more like worship.

This verse sets down the parallel operations of willed passivity



Ephesians 5:21-25 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, *be subject** to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love ****your** wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, NASB95

* present , middle, imperative

** present , active, imperative

Fear of Christ is the operative word and sets the context (vs. 21): Why do think this is so?



Love is defined by a willingness to give up my will. Marriage provides extensive experience in the possibilities of willed passivity that is when we enter into sensitive responsiveness to the will of the other; when the operation is mutual great love is the product.

View “The Bridge” illustration which is a demonstration of the integration of all the POD Seven Teaching Sessions. A copy is in your Resource Guide.

Listen to the music clip “For The Sake of the Call” by Steven Curtis Chapman

