

The **LONG** **ROAD** to **NOWHERE**

I grew up playing with Tinkertoys. Like most Americans over the past one hundred years, our family had the classic long tube full of sticks, wooden wheels, and colored connectors. Hitting the market in 1913, Tinkertoy (now owned by Hasbro) has sold about 2.5 million construction sets per year for almost a hundred years. The impetus for Tinkertoy construction sets—which initially sold for sixty cents and were called by the less-than-catchy name “Thousand Wonder Builders”—came from Charles Pajeau and Robert Petit, who dreamed up the toy as they watched children tinkering around with pencils, sticks, and empty spools of thread.

With almost a century gone by, there’s still nothing fancy about Tinkertoy sets, especially in a digital age where children seldom go anywhere without microchips of entertainment close at hand. Kids still like Tinkertoys because kids like to tinker.

And apparently, so do adults.

In the book *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*, Robert Wuthnow describes twenty-one to forty-five-year-olds as tinkers.¹ Our grandparents built. Our parents boomed. And my generation? We tinker. Of course, as Wuthnow points out, tinkering is not all bad. Those who tinker know how to improvise, specialize, pull things apart, and pull people together from a thousand different places. But tinkering also means indecision, contradiction, and instability. We are seeing a generation of young people grow up (sort of) who tinker with doctrines, tinker with churches, tinker with girlfriends and boyfriends, tinker with college majors, tinker living in and out of their parents' basement, and tinker with spiritual practices no matter how irreconcilable or divergent.

We're not consistent. We're not stable. We don't stick with anything. We aren't sure we are making the right decisions. Most of the time, we can't even make decisions. And we don't follow through. All of this means that as Christian young people we are less fruitful and less faithful than we ought to be.

Granted, youth tends to come with a significant amount of youthfulness. And with youthfulness comes indecision and instability. Young adults who tinker are not confined to any one generation. Baby boomers, and probably even builders (the generation that grew up during the Great Depression and fought in World War II), tinkered around with God and life when they were young adults. The difference, however, with my generation is that young adulthood keeps getting longer and longer. It used to be that thirty seemed old and far removed

from youth, but now it is not uncommon to hear of folks “coming of age” at forty.

Consider this one statistic: In 1960, 77 percent of women and 65 percent of men completed all the major transitions into adulthood by age thirty. These transitions include leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having a child. By 2000, only 46 percent of woman completed these transitions by age thirty, and only 31 percent of men.² It’s stunning for me to think that less than a third of men my age are done with school, out of the house, married with kids, and have a job that pays the bills. “Adulthood” is the new normal.

Now, I know there are lots of good reasons why someone may still be in school past thirty. After all, multiple college degrees take time. And I realize there are legitimate reasons why a thirty-year-old might have to live with his parents (e.g., illness, unexpected unemployment, or divorce). Concerning marriage, maybe you have the gift of celibacy. And as for a family, maybe you’ve been trying to have kids but can’t. There are lots of reasons for delayed adulthood. I understand that. Just because you’ve been on the planet for one-fourth to one-third of your life and still haven’t completed “the transition” to adulthood doesn’t mean you’re automatically a moocher, a lazy bum, or a self-indulgent vagabond.

But it could mean that. It is possible that your “unparalleled freedom to roam, experiment, learn (or not), move on, and try again” has not made you wiser, cultured, or more mature.³ Perhaps your free spirit needs less freedom and more

faithfulness. Maybe your emerging adulthood should . . . I don't know, emerge.

But let me be clear: This is not a book *just* for young people. I'm not going to attempt a generational analysis of my fellow thirtysomethings. I'm not issuing a new manifesto for baby busters and mosaics. This book is much simpler than all that. This is a book about God's will—God's will for confused teenagers, burned-out parents, retired grandparents, and, yes, tinkering millennials . . . or whatever we're called.

I bring up this whole business of aduthood because it is related to the spiritual issue of God's will. You'll find in this book some of the typical will-of-God fare—how to make wise decisions, how to choose a job, whom to marry, etc. But answering these questions is not really the aim of this book. My goal is not as much to tell you how to hear God's voice in making decisions as it is to help you hear God telling you to get off the long road to nowhere and finally make a decision, get a job, and, perhaps, get married.

The hesitancy so many of us (especially the young) feel in making decisions and settling down in life and therefore diligently searching for the will of God has at least two sources. First, the new generations enjoy—or at least think they enjoy—"unparalleled freedom." Nothing is settled after high school or even college anymore. Life is wide open and filled with endless possibilities, but with this sense of opportunity comes confusion, anxiety, and indecision. *With everything I could do and everywhere I could go, how can I know what's what?* Enter a passion to discern "God's will for my life." That's a key

reason there is always a market for books about the will of God.

Second, our search for the will of God has become an accomplice in the postponement of growing up, a convenient out for the young (or old) Christian floating through life without direction or purpose. Too many of us have passed off our instability, inconsistency, and endless self-exploration as “looking for God’s will,” as if not making up our minds and meandering through life were marks of spiritual sensitivity.

As a result, we are full of passivity and empty on follow-through. We’re tinkering around with everyone and everything. Instead, when it comes to our future, we should take some responsibility, make a decision, and just do something.