

Preparation for Turning Points

The courses of our lives are determined by a multitude of turning points. Just think about all the different possible lives you could have led. Each time you make a decision or one is imposed upon you, your life goes in a slightly different direction. What if you had made different decisions, or if different opportunities had presented themselves? Each turning point closes off some experiences but opens up others.

Turning points can range from well planned to totally spontaneous. We may choose a career for which we have prepared, or we may accept a job that just happens to come our way. Sometimes we consciously choose our friends or a life partner. Sometimes we just connect with a random person or fall head over heels in love with someone we barely know.

Often, we are aware when we are at a crossroads. Other times, without realizing it, we make small, seemingly inconsequential decisions that result in a major turning point. Deciding not to do something or beginning an emotional shift can lead to profound changes. Frederick Buechner says, “the real turning point in our lives is less likely to be the day we win the election or get married than the morning we decide not to mail the letter or the afternoon we watch the woods fill up with snow.” One day we may realize that our life has changed direction without our even noticing the process.

Some difficult turning points in our lives are beyond our control. A loved one dies. A job ends. A disability or a disease limits our capabilities. We cannot undo the change, but we can choose how we react. There are many ways we can influence the new direction our life is headed. Each of those choices and adjustments is a small turning point that can modify how the larger happening affects our lives.

Some turning points that can profoundly affect us have to do with our thoughts and judgments. We may have grown up with a long list of “should” and “should not,” and one day we realize that we don’t have to follow them. The same is true of predefined notions of our capabilities and even our self-worth. A turning point comes when we realize we are more than how we have always seen ourselves. We can also change our opinions of other people or groups of people. We have a fixed idea of who they are, but at some point we may realize that our view is limited, and we change our attitudes. These “aha” moments can be life changing.

As we live our lives, we make many decisions, big and small, conscious and unconscious. They all determine which of the many possible lives will be ours. We can have regrets for what we did or did not do, but none of us could have taken all the paths that were open to us. As Matt Haig observes in his novel *The Midnight Library*, “We only need to be one person. We only need to feel one existence. We don’t have to do everything in order to be everything, because we are already infinite. While we are alive we always contain a future of multifarious possibility.”

Below are a variety of thoughts for you to consider as you ponder the subject of Turning Points.

At some juncture in our life, we become an entirely different person than what we started as. Different dreams, different thoughts, different style, different life. When we look at our old photographs, it feels like we are looking at a stranger. Then, it makes us wonder when we stopped being that person in the photograph. *Shon Mehta*

Have no regrets in life because of the choices you make. Good or bad, they are a learning experience, to help you grow. The only regret in life, is to never make a choice at all. *James Hauenstein*

Our lives are made by our choices. First we make our choices. Then our choices make us. *Anne Frank*

In any case, while it is all very well to talk of “turning points,” one can surely only recognise such moments in retrospect. Naturally, when one looks back to such instances today, they may indeed take the appearance of being crucial, precious moments in one’s life; but of course, at the time, this was not the impression one had. There was surely nothing to indicate at the time that such evidently small incidents would render whole dreams forever irredeemable. *Kazuo Ishiguro, The Remains of the Day*

At any particular moment in a man’s life, he can say that everything he has done and has not done, that has been done and not been done to him, has brought him to this moment. If he’s being installed as Chieftain or receiving a Nobel Prize, that’s a fulfilling notion. But if he’s in a sleeping bag at ten thousand feet in a snowstorm, parked in the middle of a highway and waiting to freeze to death, the idea can make him feel calamitously stupid. *William Least Heat-Moon*

Coming out of the closet was one of the most liberating things I’ve done in my life. All the worry, concern, anxiety, all that mental chatter was gone. I didn’t have to carry a secret on my shoulder anymore. Fear, doubt, shame, and worry was suddenly replaced with love and pride. *Joel Annesley*

Every choice starts with a decision. Every decision starts with a thought. Every thought starts with a pre-conceived idea. It is up to you to decide what you do with each but always remember that the choice you make will result in the consequence you face. *Kemi Sogunle*

Every choice has a long afterlife of consequences. No one can know the eventual outcome of any decision. All you can do is make the best choice you can make in the moment. *Cassandra Clare*

Questions to Ponder

1. Think of a significant turning point in your life. How did it come about? What were the results, both good and bad, of that change in direction?
2. Sometimes people are not able to make certain choices because they are constrained by circumstance. Are there any choices that you wish you could have made? What might you have gained and what might you have lost had you been able to choose differently?
3. How have fate, chance, or unexpected events presented turning points in your life? How have these been different from those arrived at through planning and preparation?
4. What regrets do you have about some turning points in your life? How have you dealt with them?
5. Think about a turning point that involved the way you looked at yourself, another person, a group of people, or the world. How has this shift affected your opinions?
6. If there is a turning point that you may be facing soon, what are you considering?

Words of the Day

Before coming to the Gathering, reflect on a turning point in your life. For the Words of the Day, you will choose one of the following sentences to complete: “A turning point I may be facing soon is ... ”
Or “An important turning point in my life was ... ”