

**Youth Culture Lesson**  
**Finding Teachable Moments in Culture**  
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**Setting Priorities: Can Fiona Apple Help Us Remember What's Important?**

By Paul Asay

**What Happened:**

A few days ago, singer-songwriter Fiona Apple cancelled her tour of South America. It wasn't due to exhaustion, because her voice was shot or because she was due in court. She opted out because her dog needed her.

"I have a dog, Janet; and she's been ill for almost two years now, as a tumor has been idling in her chest, growing ever so slowly," Apple wrote to her fans. Now, Apple says, Janet's dying; and the singer wants to be with her.

For some folks, bowing out of a massive, money-making enterprise such as a concert tour to care for a sick pet seems strange or silly. Janet's just a dog, after all. For Apple, Janet's more than a dog. She's been a source of strength and companionship for 14 years. Apple rescued the pit bull from dog fighting when Janet was just 4 months old and Apple was 21. "We've lived in numerous houses and jumped a few make-shift families, but it's always really been the two of us," Apple writes.

"If I go away again, I'm afraid she'll die and I won't have the honor of singing her to sleep, of escorting her out," Apple continues. "Sometimes it takes me 20 minutes to pick which socks to wear to bed, but this decision was instant. These are the choices we make, which define us. I will not be the woman who puts her career ahead of love and friendship. I am the woman who stays home and bakes Tilapia for my dearest, oldest friend."

**Talk About It:**

Maybe not all of us would make the same choice Apple made, but there's no question that she's right: For all of us, our decisions define our character. When have you been faced with a character-defining decision? What decision did you make?

Apple says her decision to stay with Janet was easy—but not all the choices we should make are easy to make. Being with someone in pain isn't easy, even when you know he or she could use your help. Sometimes the right decisions can cost you prestige or respect. Have you ever known what decision you should make but were scared to make it? What did you eventually choose to do?

Sometimes the decisions that define us aren't about answering someone's need, but asking for help. Our culture sometimes tells us we're not supposed to need help (although we all do). Have you ever been at the end of your rope, swallowed your pride and asked someone to help you? Was it hard? Was it helpful?

Many people could use help this holiday season. Some might need some financial assistance to make it through Christmas. Others may be hurting emotionally—dealing with loneliness or grief. Can you think of ways to help those people? Do you think you and your friends might make a difference in their lives?

**What the Bible Says:**

“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Prov. 16:9).

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17).

“May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me” (2 Tim. 1:16-17).

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Paul Asay has covered religion for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, [Beliefnet.com](http://Beliefnet.com), and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book [God on the Streets of Gotham](#) (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife Wendy and his two children. Follow him on Twitter at @AsayPaul.