Do This and Prosper

How Do You Respond When Life Does Not Go As You Plan?

Our church had a potluck luncheon following the worship service and I had announced previously I would barbecue chicken for everyone. Our church has a gas grill and I had gotten a fresh cannister of gas for it so I could barbecue after the worship service, I went outside to light the grill. It would not light. A couple of friends tried to get it going and they were not successful. I started getting grumpy with them and frustrated with myself and I was quickly becoming disgruntled and irritable. The people of the church had brought their food to share, and I was the only one without something to provide because I could not get the grill started. In a semi panic I went to the oven in the kitchen to consider cooking the chicken in the oven but that frustrated me even more because I knew it would take what I believed would be too long. Suddenly I came up with the best idea yet of what to do. I prayed and then the Lord reminded me of Nick, that he would probably know what to do. So I sent my son to get him, and Nick came over and knew exactly what to do. Have you ever found yourself in a predicament with no answers and your emotions start to cloud your thinking and impact your relationships? I was a mess before I called upon God to guide me. Of course it helped that Nick was around. But it was as I prayed that Nick immediately came to mind. Life is filled with challenges; some great that stress your soul, others not so big but they can impact you greatly in the end. A young woman is tempted to sleep with her boyfriend. A young man doesn't know what he should do about college applications. A mother trying to decide if she should go back to work. A grandfather having to figure out his will. A couple, not sure if they should have more children. A homeless woman trying to decide if she should call her parents to see if they will let her move back in with them. Our big idea is not very profound, but it can have dramatic ramifications for your life. Choose to stay in touch with God.

The Bible of course is the great text on staying in touch with God. From front to back it promotes this. Yet how many of us forget at crucial moments to do just that. I am intrigued by the account in the Bible of Peter responding to Jesus' warning that He would be leaving the disciples and they could not follow Him where He was going. Peter could not accept the words of Jesus that he would be unable to follow Jesus. **Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."** (John 13: 37 NIV) Peter certainly is not alone in the human race among those who do not believe what Jesus says. Peter wasn't being belligerent. He simply couldn't accept that Jesus was right in this instance. One commentator has noted that Peter was wrong for at least two reasons. One, Peter certainly did not lay down his life for Jesus at Jesus' moment of crisis. Two, It was not Peter who would lay down his life for Jesus but Jesus who would lay down His life for Peter. Our theology and our view of everything gets warped by our unwillingness or inability to take into account what the Bible says and the working of God in us. Peter was convinced there was no way he could ever abandon Jesus in His time of need. But we must be careful and not fall into the same trap Peter did. You may be completely mistaken about the condition of your heart and only the Holy Spirit can reveal what you don't know about yourself. That is why it is crucial to stay in touch with God.

The traps Satan lays out for you are devious and cunning. It takes supernatural insight to see through them, but we too often don't think we need Christ's help because we become slack in our concern for what Satan can do to us. The historical account of Eve is a warning to you. She may not have been present when God adamantly warned Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but Eve was certainly aware of the command and the risk of disobeying. Satan persuasively insisted Eve would not be hurt if she ate the forbidden fruit and would in fact benefit from eating it. **Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** (Genesis 3:1-5 NIV) Now this is what troubles me greatly about all of this. Since Eve knew the grave risk involved in even touching the forbidden fruit, why didn't she at least pause for a moment and go back to God and find out what He thought. God after all made it a practice of physically hanging out with Adam and Eve in the Garden. It would not have been very tough to reach out to Him and get the Lord's feedback. But like you and me all too often, Eve never bothered and the destruction to her life and all those who then followed was horrific. She chose not to stay in touch with God, and it literally killed her.

There is a most odd account found in the ancient book of 1 Kings in the Old Testament of a prophet sent by God to go from Judah to Israel to tell Jeroboam, the rebel and idolatrous king of Israel that the altar he used to sacrifice to his false gods would supernaturally be split apart as a sign of God's coming judgment of Israel. **That same day the man of God gave a sign: "This is the sign the Lord has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out."** (1 Kings 13: 3 NIV) When this happened just as he said it would, the king was so cut to the quick that he wanted to honor the man of God and throw a feast for him and give him a gift. But the man of God would have nothing of it. **But the man of God answered the king, "Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: 'You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.'" So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel.** (1 Kings 13: 8-10 NIV) Now strangely, an old prophet heard about all this and met with the man of God at his house. He too invited the man of God to eat but in this case, he insisted that the Lord had told him the man of God was to eat with him. This was a lie. The Lord had said no such thing to the old prophet and why he lied we do not know. But what is most curious to me and in fact troubling because I see myself and so many other Christians in how the man of God responded. He did not hold fast to the word of God given already to him and more than that, never bothered to go to God himself to find out if what the prophet said was true. As a result, like Eve, he lost his life because he didn't. It is perhaps the most common mistake Christians make, one that can cost them dearly. They do not stay in touch with God and rely upon Him to guide them. If the man of God was smart, just like you, he would have stayed in touch with God.

The book of Acts gives us a valuable lesson on the importance and value of staying in touch with God. Clearly Peter learned an important lesson regarding relying upon himself to figure out things. Peter and John were arrested for preaching Christian faith in Jerusalem by the same people who had Jesus taken into custody and demanded of Pilate that Jesus needed to be executed. It was truly a threat they faced, and it was not inconsequential. When the priests and religious authorities made several more menacing warnings about continuing to preach about Jesus, Peter and John immediately went back to the other believers gathered together and gave their report of the way the Jewish leaders tried to bully them. The response of the group was not handwringing or angry protestations of mistreatment or any sort of strategizing about what to do next. The disciples and other Christians prioritized at that moment of crisis staying in touch with God. **When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.** (Acts 4: 24 NIV) As a result, the supernatural strength of the Lord was given them and fear and worry and despair left them and they knew what to do.

You never know when a destructive temptation is around the corner like was the case for David when one fateful night he casually went up onto the roof of the palace and gazed about. You don't know when a great risk is facing you like when Peter and the disciples went with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane or when Joseph went to go visit his brothers at his father's bequest out in the fields. Life changes quite rapidly at times and without warning and you need the Lord to guide you and empower you and to protect you from temptation every day and throughout the day. The Bible has a fabulous approach to take if you have come to realize that Satan has set many traps for you to keep you from living faithfully and happily as a Christian. Perhaps it would do you well to memorize what it says. **But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign Lord; in you I take refuge — do not give me over to death. Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers.** (Psalm 141 :8-9 NIV) Our big idea for today and for this week is crucial for you and all who want to live the best life they can. Choose to stay in touch with God. You will be glad in the end that you did.