



Why Is This Your Best Move Yet? How Can You Improve Your Life?

An ancient Jewish tale is told of a man who was greatly frustrated by his living conditions. In a one room hut were his wife, six kids and in-laws. His nerves were frayed, quarreling was always going on at home and he had no peace. He went to his Rabbi to see what he should do. "My home life is terrible", he complained to the Rabbi. The Rabbi thought deeply for a few moments and then softly replied. "Promise me you will do exactly as I say, and I am certain your condition will improve." The desperate man cried out, "I promise Rabbi! Will do anything you tell me." "Good. How many animals do you own?" "I have a cow, a goat and some chickens", responded the poor man. "Good", the wise Rabbi commanded. Take all your animals and move them into your house." Dumbfounded, the man did as he was told. He had after all promised the Rabbi he would. The next day the poor fellow went back to the rabbi, ready to pull out his hair. "I can't stand it," he screamed. "My life is horrible. The house is a barn! Please save me from this!" The Rabbi responded peacefully, "My son, go home and take the chickens out of your house. Trust God to help you." The guy returned home, took the chickens outside and yet it seemed to get worse. The goat was smashing everything in the house. Returning to the rabbi, the man begged him to do something. "Certainly son", the rabbi answered. "Go home and take the goat out of the house and trust the Lord to make everything well for you." It did not help though. Even though the goat was now outside, the cow made the hut smell horrifically. What was worse was the cow was constantly in the way and bumping into things. The pitiful poor fellow tromped back to the rabbi. "How can you expect us to live with any peace having the cow in the house", he cried. "Oh, you are right", came back the rabbi. "Go home immediately and send the cow out of your home." Oh, what relief that brought. The very next day the man showed up at the rabbi's house, nearly jumping with joy. "What a miracle" he proclaimed. "Our house is so peaceful and quiet and roomy with all those animals outside. We are so happy!" Perhaps the key to your happiness is closer than you think.

James the brother of Jesus noticed even two thousand years ago the tendency of us all. Maybe this is true of you too. You make plans and get bent out of shape when they don't go your way. It's not just pessimists who make this turn. It is almost universal. You figure out what you want to happen and if it doesn't work out as planned, you grow frustrated and sometimes even angry or depressed. There is a reason why you fuss so much about what is coming. You want life to be better, to have an upgrade. There is risk in that thinking though. James makes this declaration. **Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.** (James 4: 13-16 NIV)

At first glance, this correction seems unfair. Aren't we supposed to plan for the future? Isn't it naive to not organize today and also tomorrow? Of course we plan. Even Jesus knew exactly what was coming and how He would respond to future events. What are all the prophecies except indications of God's schedule. The issue is the way we approach planning and organizing days ahead. Jesus gives this correction. **Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.** (Matthew 6: 34 NIV) Worry is a sin, not because God demands you be fake about your

feelings but due to its denial of God in what you face. If worry were simply the nervousness and adrenalin produced by your struggles, it would simply be normal living. Jesus Himself sweat either drops of blood or produced perspiration that had the look of blood when He faced the Cross as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Bible says He was in “anguish”. Even Christ felt the strain in His body of facing the future. Worry however is the product of a Godless approach to the future. It is reckoning on things without taking into account the active work of the Lord in your life to make all things right and good for you. The most crucial verse for your daily processing of everything you face is Romans 8: 28. **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.** (Romans 8: 28 ESV) This is true every time, anywhere. Regardless of circumstances or situations, God is working out each and every issue before you for your good as long as you love Him. Stay attached to Jesus and it will turn out for your good.

When Jesus told the parable of the rich man who filled his barns with excessive amounts of grain, planning to live the rest of his life in luxury and ease, it did not go as he expected. **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"** (Luke 12: 20 NIV) If you take this warning seriously, it sends shock waves through your soul. Jesus gives us an explanation of how you are to respond to this dire warning. **"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."** (Luke 12: 21 NIV) The primary concern was not the man's wealth, although that was a tremendous issue, it was that he was not rich toward God. As you look closely at the parable, you see that the rich man had no concern about God at all. The Lord was completely outside his thinking and for him, that was a deadly mistake. Even Christian leaders and exemplary church members make the same crucial error.

There is a verse you need to grasp. It comes from the Proverbs. **A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?** (Proverbs 20: 24 NIV) Literally this reads in the Hebrew, **From the Lord the steps of a mighty man and from a person how will he discern his way?** Understanding this is a clumsy translation as it is literal, the Proverbs asks a simple question. How can anyone on his or her own figure out what to do, where to go? Clearly people do this all the time. They go here and there, do this and that without a single thought about God. The verse isn't talking about the common one who is like the guy storing up his riches. It is the mighty one, the person of noble character and heroism, the one who does things that last into eternity, who has become a part of the Kingdom of God. That one is guided by the Lord; has a firm grasp on the leadership of the King of Kings and follows Him. As a result the faithful follower of Christ knows the right way every time. In a fascinating twist to the verse not brought out in the English translations, the last part is actually a question. How can a person discern his way? In other words, “How can anyone without God know what to do?” The way the question is put in the Hebrew, the expected answer is, “They can't!” You really don't know what is best in life without God showing you the way! You are blindly making decisions.

A fascinating and oft overlooked example of what the writer of the Proverbs is describing is found in Acts 16. Paul and his traveling companions had decided that the next stage of their missionary trip would be an excursion into Asia or what is now known as Turkey. **Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.** (Acts 16: 6 NIV) Somehow the Holy Spirit let Paul and his friends knew not to go into the province of Asia. We can't say what would have happened if they had gone there. For those of us not used to listening to the Spirit guide us, we might have thought it was a huge loss to not share the Gospel in Asia. Paul though learned that the small still voice of God is always right and best to follow. Never make plans without giving your mind the freedom to be led by the Spirit of God. Believe the Lord will guide you and somehow He will always show you the way no matter how big or small your choice seems to be.