
GETTING COUNSEL FOR YOUR FUTURE

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COUNSEL FROM THE BIBLE

The Bible isn't like a textbook filled with static facts. God wants His word to actively counsel us in the midst of our days, giving us insight and understanding about the choices we face and the problems we want to resolve. If we'll look for it to happen, verses from the Bible will often rise to the surface of our awareness, and they act as incredibly effective navigation points and answer-givers by which we can steer our course. God's word has the uncanny ability to burrow down to the true heart of every matter (Hebrews 4:12), separating issues well enough for us to see what's really going on in our heart—or in others'.

Sometimes, general principles taken from Bible verses help us make decisions about what to say or do. For instance, many scriptures alert us to the undesirability of debt because of how it takes away our freedom and causes us to come under the hand of a stranger (Proverbs 6:1-5; 22:7). Facing a decision about our future, we would likely want to make the choice that reduced or eliminated our debt—rather than increasing it! There certainly are exceptions (like getting a mortgage), and it isn't a rigid, hard-and-fast rule, but the general, biblical principle counsels us.

Other times, verses from the Bible give us precise direction and prompt us to action. For example, when reading about the ministry of reconciliation God has entrusted to us (2 Corinthians 5:17-21), we might find ourselves thinking about a broken relationship from our past—and know that it's time to write a letter of apology. That doesn't mean we accept total responsibility for the *not-as-it-used-to-be* condition of

the relationship; neither is it completely up to us to repair the relationship. Rather, as another verse counsels us, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*” (Romans 12:18). The whole counsel of God informs our thinking. Amazing things happen as a result of responding to such promptings.

SCRIPTURES ON YOUR MIND

Additionally, when you are praying with or for someone else, you will find that Bible passages and phrases come unbidden to your mind. They just pop into your consciousness. Especially when a cluster of verses come to you, it’s clear that the Lord is saying something *spiritual* to that person. By *spiritual*, I don’t mean weird—just different than how that person would naturally think.

Let’s say a friend comes to you seeking counsel about a difficult work situation: the manager is unnecessarily harsh and critical of your friend, and often takes advantage of her diligence and work ethic by forcing her to cover for the manager’s longer-than-appropriate lunch break, by taking the credit for her work—and by blaming her (in front of the boss) for his mistakes.

What’s your counsel?

Suppose the verses that flood into your awareness are passages like, “*turn the other cheek*” (Matthew 5:39); “*submit even to those who are unreasonable*” (1 Peter 2:18-20); and, “*if anyone is suffering, let him pray*” (James 5:13)? Would you suggest a different course to you friend if the verses in your mind were, “*don’t be unequally yoked*” (2 Corinthians 6:14); “*...David arose and fled from Saul*” (1 Samuel 21:10); and, “*great persecution scattered the church*” (Acts 8:1)?

That’s what I mean by saying the word of God is living and effective; the Holy Spirit applies it personally to each situation. Can people manipulate texts to justify their unrighteous stance in any given matter? Yes. But should that make us back away from eager anticipation that God will counsel us with His “eye upon” us (Psalm 32:8)? No! Solomon understood that “*...in abundance of counselors there is victory*” (Proverbs 11:14), and he undoubtedly learned from his father’s words, “[*God’s*] testimonies also are my delight; they are my counselors” (Psalms 119:24).

It’s incredible, when you think about it. God leads us in the way we should go by counseling us with His written word, brought to our remembrance by His Spirit (John 14:26), for the purpose of making us more like His Son (Romans 8:28-29)!

As a pastor, I often had the privilege of receiving such counsel for the direction/focus of our entire church program, as well as for individuals in our church. Sometimes, an answer from the Lord came as the sort of *scripture-in-my-heart* I've been describing. Quite frequently, I got a thematic cluster of verses without having been seeking the Lord for specific direction. I suppose the unlooked for leading of the Lord, in this regard, is much like what He does in our individual lives as we pray in the Spirit. Because "*we don't know how to pray as we should, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us*" (Romans 8:26-27). It's so amazingly fun to be led by the Lord, especially when we don't even know that we need leading. He simply wants to do something wonderful to us and through us.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

On any given day, our life in the Lord can seem anything but brighter than it was yesterday! Stuff happens; steady, day-by-day devotional reading can disappear in three days time. Some mornings I wake up feeling spiritually lousy, and I can't put my finger on why. Weeks or months of spiritual vitality are sometimes followed inexplicably with long seasons of drought. We're up...and down; we progress...and fall back. Regardless of why we end up in spiritual doldrums, a common reaction is despair: a hopeless, *I'll-never-get-out-of-this-downward-spiral-sense* that THIS IS THE END (Psalm 42:11).

Many things can lead to a sense of a spiritual impasse in our lives. Our focus isn't primarily on WHY we feel stuck and alone, or why we lose momentum in our spiritual walk. Let's not race too quickly toward blame—of ourselves or others—in our efforts to explain why things aren't going as well as they once did. Focus rather on the promises of scripture that give us hope for a brighter future, regardless of what has been trying to dim our hopes.

I'm not saying that it doesn't matter why we've ended up feeling out-of-sorts spiritually; it does matter if it's something we can stop (like our own behavior or attitude) in order to prevent future spiritual lassitude. I'm not saying that God does not care about the situation we're in; He does, and He is able to deliver us from it!

But, the great news is that God has promises in His word to address spiritual lethargy and to reinvigorate our sense of calling and purpose on earth. Those promises can be applied to our lives no matter why or how we've ended up with so little real hope about a brighter tomorrow! Innocent victims, guilty perpetrators, negligent sons, willful daughters, busy moms, too-busy dads, legalists, prisoners, judges, the longsuffering or the short-of-spirit (quitters)—all these can take hope in God's promises for our future:

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6

How we got where we are—whether it is our fault, others’ or no one’s—is not the key to getting us into His future for us. *He* is the answer to all of our tomorrows, and by His grace, He will lead us on ever brighter and ever higher.

GOD SEES THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Since so many of God’s ways and thoughts are wildly different from ours, it shouldn’t be a surprise to discover that He looks at things differently than we do.. For instance, people tend to look at the “...outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Because we are unable to see the future and what will be, we fix most of our attention on what is and has been; God, on the other hand, lives beyond the element of time, so He is focused mostly on what is still to be:

“That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.” Ecclesiastes 3:15

We can’t really even see the future, but God can. That’s why He looks at it and we don’t!

That has huge implications for us—and our future. Because we have a very limited awareness that is confined within the past and the present, we tend to conclude that our future must somehow emerge from what has been or what is currently true of our life. We think the future is determined by what precedes it: *“I won’t have enough money in the future for this bill if I don’t have enough for it now”; “I’ll never have the job of my dreams if it hasn’t happened yet”; “I’ve been rejected my whole life, so I guess that’s what will always be my lot!”*

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The reason you and I can have hope for a brighter future is because God has the power and the desire to make a future for us based on His plans for us rather than on our own history. Do some things that happen now have consequences for the future? Yes. But they do not determine our future.

Think of it another way; make time into three geographic locations—countries called PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE. Normally, traveling west you would start in PAST, cross the border into PRESENT and finally end up in FUTURE. In the natural arena, time has three simple and chronological segments. Spiritually speaking, however,

our past, present and future aren't equally connected or sequential. The country FUTURE shares very little border with the other two countries—and FUTURE is divided by an impassable mountain range into two regions. There is no way to get from PRESENT to the other side of FUTURE unless God transports us there.

God is always calling us into our future. He calls us away from today and yesterday, so we can enjoy tomorrow. Sometimes the journey away from our past and out of our present takes longer than we had hoped, but His is a relentless transport ever working on our behalf, pressing us "...forward to what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:13).

BIBLE PASSAGES FOR YOUR FUTURE

Let me offer to you—for your consideration and reflection—a cluster of Bible passages that recently came unbidden to my heart. I believe they hold hope for the future.

1. **Jeremiah 23:7-8**—God has future deliverances planned for us, not just past ones. We can all remember the amazing day when we first accepted Jesus as our Savior and the Forgiver of our sins. Wow! But, He is still our Savior—even when we leave the land of promise in our life and willfully choose to live in another place. He knows how to bring us back when we have wandered away!
2. **Haggai 2:9**—The work of God's people to restore the Temple in Jerusalem had stalled because of the opposition of enemies, the long passage of time and the loss of prophetic vision. How like our spiritual lives! How many good intentions and godly projects or enterprises have we started, only to have them sputter and nearly die off? Prophetic words—like the ones we're receiving in these teachings—can make all the difference, and we'll finish the work with a celebration of God's grace.
3. **Luke 2:52**—Just as Jesus grew in wisdom and stature before God and man, so we are still in the process of maturing spiritually. It has NOT YET appeared what we will one day be (1 John 3:2), but in the meantime we can continue in submission even to those who might not fully understand what God is up to in our lives.
4. **Proverbs 4:18**—Even though it might seem like we've lost our way—or at least that our sight has grown dim, God is continually increasing the brightness of our witness and our wisdom. He is using things in our life to

make us more like Jesus—in time. Though we can't always see how He is turning our circumstances to spiritual profit, He is!

5. **2 Corinthians 3:17-18**—Even though the Law communicates something of the glory of God, and shows people how to live like He wants them to live, that glory is nothing compared to the Spirit who whispers to us within our heart, telling us how to follow Jesus. Additionally, the Spirit can bring freedom from places of bondage and brokenness in our lives.
6. **Proverbs 3:5-6**—God's goal for our future is to make our ways straight (even, pleasant and prosperous). But that cannot happen unless we rely upon Him. We have a choice to put our confidence in our own reasoning and conclusions, or to trust God, who can do what we are incapable of doing. The key is to acknowledge Him in every situation: "God, where are You in all of this? Where and how would You have me stand?"
7. **Psalms 42:11**—Days and seasons of despair come with living life! The clamor and warfare (spiritual) all around us bring us low and disturbs us deeply. When people or situations disappoint us, how do we keep from becoming defeated? When it seems all hope is lost, what is our stay? Though we draw lines and decide when "it's too late," God promises to raise the dead! Even when we have the "sentence of death" within us (2 Corinthians 1:8-10), *"that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope."*