

Do You Know Where You're Going To?

Romans 4:18-24 (CEV) Hebrews 11:8-10 (Msg)

Instead of comments about the weather, I find people now start off a casual conversation by asking me "So, ... what are you going to do when you retire? What are your plans?" I'm a little embarrassed to answer truthfully, ... but I do. I say: "I really don't know. I have some ideas, but I really don't know!" I almost feel as if I have stepped onto the set of 'Mahogany' and Diana Ross is singing:

Do you know where you're going to?
Do you like the things that life is showing you
Where are you going to?
Do you know...?

Do you get
What you're hoping for
When you look behind you
There's no open doors
What are you hoping for?
Do you know...?

Now looking back at all we've planned
We let so many dreams
Just slip through our hands
Why must we wait so long
Before we'll see
How sad the answers
To those questions can be

Do you know where you're going to?
Do you like the things that life is showing you
Where are you going to?
Do you know...?

Do you get
What you're hoping for
When you look behind you
There's no open doors
What are you hoping for?
Do you know...?

Do you know? Do I know? What *am* I hoping for?

Every time I hear about a pre-retirement seminar, supposedly a necessary ingredient in planning for my future, I feel guilty. Of course I do guilt extremely well, and so when this sin of omission faces me, I realize that just weeks away from retirement, it's too late for courses anyway. My guilt is doubly compounded. So, do I know? Not really. Do you know? What does the future hold?

I think that probably everyone here has that question in varying degrees, even if you have taken all your pre-whatever courses, and meticulously laid out your plans for your future. Perhaps it's a "big move" question, a relationship question, a decision that needs to be made about finances, a question about health that was unexpected. Perhaps it's simply a question of "will I make it? Do I have what it takes?" I don't think these questions are age-specific. Even children in a loving family environment may not be as worried about the future as care-laden adults, but children too have concerns.

I remember when I was in my mid 20's I went to a psychic on the recommendation of a friend in Buffalo, because I wanted to know what lay around the bend for me. It was shortly after I had left the ministry in another denomination. And, since it seemed that the whole direction of my life to that point had suddenly gone off-roading, and everything I had planned and looked forward to had been changed, I was really grasping for some sense of guidance. What should my next step be?

I don't know whether this woman was spiritually gifted, or a fraud. She seemed quite ok, rather grandmotherly and warm. She wasn't your average fortune-teller, I was told, but rather a spiritualist, which I gathered was the name of some sort of a religious group. It was quite impressive, actually. She told me my grandfather was there and feeding chickens, and he was with me to help me through the difficult days ahead. (Now, both grandfathers were ministers, but my mother's father did a few agricultural things on the side on the outskirts of Ottawa, including training difficult horses – I think he was a bit of a horse whisperer – *and* raised chickens) She said I would know for sure this was true because I would be seated somewhere and a light would go on and off, on and off, all by itself.

Well, sure enough a couple of weeks I was seated somewhere, in the most inauspicious room in the house – which in that particular house was separated from the sink and bathtub – and the overhead light, whose switch was on the inside wall behind the closed door, went on and off, on and off. That was supposed to assure me that my grandfather Christie had taken time away from feeding the chickens to let me know he was looking after my well being. At least he could have knocked!

Now – from my vantage point today I would *not* recommend running off to have someone gaze into a crystal ball on your behalf, or get caught up with sorcery, or the rattling of bones in a cup. But, sometimes we don't listen, do we? At that "seeking for answers" period of my life I even went through a time when Ouija practice took up many hours, and many amazing things happened with an upturned wine glass on an old oak table.

I wouldn't do it again. (Some time ask me why – preferably around a campfire when you want to be scared out of your wits). Nor would I recommend that anyone else dabble with these forces. I can understand why we all want to know what lies ahead.

And if an opportunity arises to get some quick-fix answers I can understand the attraction of the psychic or the Ouija board.

However, I would strongly suggest that you *not* open yourself up to these practices. The stories I would tell you around the campfire are scary because they're true. And in the long run they were pretty spectacular but not spiritually helpful. Rather they were hurtful. Incidentally, the Bible isn't very kind in its evaluation of sorceries and the ilk, and from experience I can say 'with good reason.'

But, I do understand the deep desire to know what lies ahead. We only have one life and when it's time to make a right or a left turn, to buy or to sell, to stay put or move on, to check out a retirement home or keep struggling at home, to pop the question or bite our tongues, to have another child, or be content with seven, to invest or divest, to have that hip replaced or hope for a miracle, we all would like to know the right answer. Most of us can't figure out what that answer is and the repercussions from a "yea" or "nay" decision, and we need help.

Now, looking back, I think I would be more inclined to do the Abrahamic thing. It seems riskier. Not nearly as tangible as one's grandfather turning the lights on and off as one sits captive. But, as I look at my life in retrospect, I really didn't need that assurance. Actually, I'm not sure anything that the spiritualist said really did come true since it was all so general that it could have been interpreted any way. There's a knack to saying things the listener wants to hear.

The Abrahamic thing?

Anna read to us today:

"By an Act of faith, Abraham said yes to God's call to travel to an unknown place that would become his home. When he left he had no idea where he was going.

By an act of faith he lived in the country promised him ..." Hebrews 8:8,9a Msg.

If you don't know where you're going, you're in good company. When Abraham moved on out "he had no idea where he was going." It made me feel better when I read that I was not alone in not having a meticulous plan, an accurate map rolled out in front of me. Every time someone asks me what my plans are for after retirement, or "do I know where I am going to?" I really need to say something like -

Just like Abraham:

"I do not know where I am going
till I've seen where I have been
And when I see where I have been
I see His Hand
Leading me to where I am today
He is forever ..
and I am forever on the Way" -unknown-

Mary Mac used that little poem in her message last Sunday night, and I remember thinking: that's it! Our faith for the future is based on our knowledge of who God is and what God has done in the past. Abraham already had established a relationship with God. He knew God would not lead him down the garden path!

Anna also read:

“Abraham never doubted or questioned God’s promise. His faith made him strong, and he gave all the credit to God” Romans 4:18 CEV

His confidence was not just in the promise that God made, but rather in God himself. Depending on who makes them, sometimes promises come rather cheap. A promissory note from a derelict n’er do well probably isn’t worth the paper it’s written on. But, the same note from a substantial, well-respected businessman represents the worth of the promise. It’s not the “Promise” but the “Promisor” that makes the difference.

Abraham knew that the Promisor, Jehovah God, was good to keep His promises, and that was all Abraham needed. His dealings with God in the past had helped bolster his confidence, and as we read:

“Abraham was certain that God could do what he had promised. ”Romans 4:21CEV

As I look back to the times when I went to different sources for direction in my life, and even worse, relied on my own sense of direction – which is terrible, I wonder why I didn’t just trust God? It is easier now with a track record that can be referenced, but the whole idea of blindly trying to figure out the future now seems ludicrous to me. When there is One who stands, figuratively speaking, with one foot in the Past and one in the Future, why wouldn’t I trust Him to lead me into the unknown days ahead?

It all boils down to trust. If I’m in a good relationship with God, and I know that God sees the future – because He’s already in it – and not only knows the way I should take, but knows which is the *best* way, then why wouldn’t I put my faith in Him to direct me? And if I know that He also knows I can be a bit stubborn at times, why can’t I trust Him to make the way forward unmistakably clear to me? If I believe that God wants us all individually to be in the best place for us, not just for us and our sakes, but for His – because that’s the way God’s will for the world is fulfilled, why can’t I just relax and let Him show me the way? And show you, you, you, and you the way?

It’s not a bad thing for us not to know the future, when we know who holds the future. In fact, it’s a *good* thing. Imagine what it would be like if we were given a detailed map outlining each step we should take, and when we should take it? How easy would it be to get a little cocky about life, and head off on our own because *we* now know the way? “Thanks for the map, God. See ya!” No relationship there! No need to trust!

No I don’t have the answer to “Do you know where you’re going to?” Some thoughts. Some ideas. But I really think that just as Abraham went out not knowing where he was going, I can – you can – too. We can, because it’s all about relationship. It’s all about trust.

I don't know about tomorrow;
I just live from day to day.
I don't borrow from its sunshine
For its skies may turn to grey.
I don't worry o'er the future,
For I know what Jesus said.
And today I'll walk beside Him,
For He knows what lies ahead.

Many things about tomorrow
I don't seem to understand
But I know who holds tomorrow
And I know who holds my hand.ⁱⁱ

Many things about tomorrow
I don't seem to understand
But I know who holds tomorrow
And I know who holds my hand.

AMEN!

ⁱ Theme from Mahogany as sung by Diana Ross. Composers: M. Masser / G. Goffin Sung today by Catherine Oxenford Grant

ⁱⁱ Ira Stanphil "I Don't Know About Tomorrow"