

Lesson Four

Trust – Rely on God to provide, reaping blessings I did not sow

One of the best qualities of the blackberries, to me, is that I did nothing to produce them. I didn't plant them, fertilize them, water them or cultivate them in any way. They are completely free except for my time and labor to pick them and bring them in the house. I don't make any preparations to over-winter the canes or ensure they produce the following year. They simply appear. I don't wonder or worry about them, I know they will grow and be ready for us to enjoy. There are very few things in life that are simply given with virtually no work involved and no strings attached.

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He had to teach them what it meant to be His children. They needed to learn to trust Him which was not easy for them. After all, God had abandoned them in Egypt for over 400 years! God began by providing food in the form of Manna six out of seven days each week, with a double portion on the sixth day so they could observe the Sabbath on the seventh day. The Israelites did not plant to produce Manna. They did not water or fertilize it to produce a large crop; they couldn't even save it from one day to the next with the exception of the sixth day to the seventh. They didn't ask for Manna itself, in fact, it was so foreign to them that is how it got its name – Manna means “what is it?” Nothing like it had ever been seen before, or to my knowledge, since. God provided Manna every morning outside of the Sabbath for the entire forty years the Israelites wandered in the desert, proving His faithfulness.

There are times when situations in our lives will be out of our control. We can consume ourselves with worry and lose sleep over the circumstances, but in the end there may be nothing we can do except lay it at Jesus' feet and pray. Luke 12:24 asks us, "who among you can add one hour to his life by worrying?" and implores us to trust in Him, to know that we are more important than the flowers of the field and the sparrows. Trust Him to give us good gifts and pray that we recognize them.

This doesn't mean that we should be passive in our existence and completely rely on the Lord to provide for all our needs. In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, he gives these instructions:

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "if a man will not work, he shall not eat."

-2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 NIV

So it becomes confusing, when should I take matters into my own hands and when should I wait on the Lord? There are no hard and fast rules for this one, no guidelines, flowcharts, or decision trees, just your prayers and your willingness to accept whatever His answer may be.

When my husband and I were looking to buy a house, it was a very stressful situation. Our search lasted four years and there are still days when I ask myself if we did the right thing or

not. A quick review of all the events that led us to our house confirms for me that we are where we are supposed to be. At first, we were not very unified in the type of property we wanted or even the location. My husband wanted a more rural property where I was more suburban. He was leaning toward a wooded environment; I wanted property more open and sunny. He liked a ranch style house, I liked colonials. We looked at thousands of properties online, drove by hundreds, toured dozens and finally made an offer, which was rejected. I was devastated, but my husband was relieved. He could see all the work the place needed, where all I saw was the potential the finished product could be . . . someday. I'm the dreamer, he's the practical one. During our research, we came across some negotiating instructions. Simply stated, we were advised to always be prepared to walk away from a deal. If we weren't prepared to walk away, then we had already "lost" and would pay whatever the seller asked. We thoughtfully re-evaluated the property, the work it needed and how much it would all cost. The truth was that we believed our offer was fair for the condition of the property and we were not willing to pay more for it. We did not counter-offer.

Our offer on the second property we found was also rejected. When our offer was accepted on the third property, our current home, we still questioned ourselves every day if we were doing the right thing. There was plenty of drama during our closing process, even to the point that we both believed we would not close. We kept the mindset that it wasn't over until it was over and up to the day before the closing, we were both willing to walk away if the Lord placed a stumbling block in the road.

Throughout the process, we prayed for two things: 1) For the Lord to lead us like sheep because we were blind and stupid and really didn't know where we were supposed to be, and 2) for opened and closed doors. I equated it to refusing to force a square peg into a round hole. We could have forced the issue with either of the first two properties by raising our offers until the sellers accepted, but we didn't. The key was that we both had humble hearts and were willing to accept God's Will for us instead of believing that we knew what was best for us. At the time in each situation it was difficult to believe that there could be a property out there that was better than the one we had made an offer on. We had looked in three different counties and dozens of communities. For me, it seemed impossible. My comfort phrase became, "I can't wait to see the place God has picked out for us, if this place isn't it!" By waiting on God and His timing, the property we purchased was far and away better than any of the others we had made offers on. In fact, I had looked at our property online six months prior to our purchase and it was way out of our price range. The owner had become impatient and dropped the price by nearly 23%, putting it smack dab in the middle of our affordability.

I had a much more difficult time getting through the entire process than my husband did because my trust issues ran much deeper. It was very hard for me to imagine that God was really that concerned about me when there were so many bigger problems in the world. Not that I didn't believe He loved me and cared for me, I just thought I wasn't really that important to Him, He had bigger fish to fry. I know this isn't true every time I look at my

house number, which is the same as my birthdate, and I know that I am exactly where He intended for me to be.

It is important to remember that when we commit to follow God He is our partner and we can rely upon Him. Shortly after my husband and I were married, I committed to the Lord that I would stick to a budget and not spend any money unnecessarily. The very same day, I returned a pair of sneakers my husband had bought me for a Christmas present because they were the wrong size. My mistake was in **returning** them and not **exchanging** them. When I went back to the shoe department to get the correct size, I realized that when my husband bought the shoes they had been on sale for 20% off, now they were not. As I stood in the checkout line, I silently apologized to the Lord for being so careless and breaking my commitment **the very same day I had made it**. I pledged to be more careful in the future. Suddenly, someone in the next line tapped me on the shoulder and asked me if I would like a coupon. I gratefully accepted it. It was for 20% off the entire purchase, no minimum amount, so I was able to purchase the replacement pair with the money I had received from the return and not one penny more which allowed me to keep my commitment. I do not know why this person chose to give me the coupon from all the tens of people waiting to checkout except that God had answered my prayer and forgiven my (almost) broken vow.

Assessment and Further Thought

What areas of my life am I afraid to release to God's control?

Why am I afraid to turn it over to Him?

Can I remember any examples of God's faithfulness to me, times when He provided for me beyond my expectations?

What will convince me that I am important to God? Am I willing to accept His will for me and that His plan is better than mine?

Verses for study and encouragement

Isaiah 46: 3b-4 you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Psalms 118:6-8 The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The Lord is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.

Psalms 121:1-3 I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Prayer time

Dear Jesus, You know my heart better than I know it myself, please help me to find the root of my trust issues with You and to resolve them. Give me better eyes to see all the ways that You care for me and provide for me on a daily basis. Teach me that I am important to You. Convince me that Your plan for me is better than mine. Amen

Additional items for prayer