

Spiritual lessons at family time

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It was Sunday afternoon with relatively few commitments to meet. We had blocked the evening as family time and Shelley suggested we all play a game of Monopoly. One by one, we came to the table to pick out game pieces, pass out play money, and re-read the rules. Finally it was time to begin. Things started off fairly predictable as we each took our turn at rolling the dice and advancing our position, buying up property, and collecting our \$200 for circling the board. I had no idea that we were about to see a spiritual lesson unfold in the progression of our family fun.

Two hours into the game, there was a sense of weariness on the faces of some of our younger players. Fortunately, grandparents arrived with a renewed sense of enthusiasm and strategy. I had accumulated some property and cash and was experiencing a bit of razzing for these early successes. However, it would only be a matter of time before the real monopoly mayhem would begin as this amalgam of recreation and competitive capitalism would produce America's newest real estate mogul; my very own wife, Shelley. Who knew?

After the seventh hour of competition finally finished, it had become obvious where this was headed. Diabolical domination may be a bit exaggerative, but it didn't stop us from using the term, or anything else that we could think of that described some of the relentless shrewd business practices we were woefully watching unleashed upon us. With every turn of the dice, cartoon currency flowed from our accounts to hers. As she converted houses into hotels, her holdings became such high-rent districts, that merely landing on one of her spots would mean sudden death. And because she controlled one whole side of the board, insolvency seemed imminent.

And here is the rub, we all found ourselves changing our goals. Instead of trying to advance around the board in pursuit of passing "Go" and collecting that much-needed stipend, making purchases, and growing wealth, we found ourselves settling for something far less. For those of us scratching the surface of survival, our aspirations had plummeted to hopes of merely landing on the spot that sends you to jail, and remaining confined as long as possible so one didn't have to take their turn and risk being a guest at one of Shelley's Ritz Carlton or Four Season hotels. Bankruptcy beckoned at every opportunity and genuine possibilities seemed erased by financial futility. We just wanted the game to be over. At around midnight, after eight hours of cheering and jeering, that turned to doom and gloom for the rest of us, we finally put a capstone, or should I say headstone, on the whole agonizing triumphal defeat, and called it

a day. Whew!

The lesson has nothing to do with avoiding being fast talked into entering a cutthroat competition with a make-believe money magnet millionaire in training, and everything to do with a message from the Bible. You see, so many of us live our Christian lives having given up long ago on the real dreams, and are living the up-and-down, stop-and-go life of survival that is reminiscent of a roller coaster ride stuck in traffic. So many can look to a time in their lives when they were convinced they were destined to do great things. When someone asked you what you want to do with your life, your answer may have seemed so idealistic that some glazed over with loss about your exuberance in optimism. This is when you still believed all things were possible. But the words of Christ are as true for you today as they ever have been and you really can do amazing things as the God of the universe empowers you with his spirit.

Do you want to feed the hungry, or heal the sick, or help bring peace to a paralyzed planet? You can! Maybe you need God to push the reset button on your life so you can start the game over. He can! Jesus describes this as being "born again." If your future looks a lot like my Monopoly game where minimizing losses and numbing the pain seems to be your best options, open up the Bible and look again at the wonderful adventure God wants for you. And remember these words from Scripture: "Let us not grow weary in doing what is good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." — Galatians 6:9

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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:30am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
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Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
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