

WINNING WITH THE HAND YOU'RE DEALT



Van Moody

“A PERSON WHO FEARS GOD DEALS RESPONSIBLY WITH ALL OF REALITY, NOT JUST A PIECE OF IT.”

ECCLESIASTES 7:18 (MSG)

Most of us have heard it said, “Life is like a hand of poker. You have to play the cards you’re dealt.” Even if we have never played poker, but have played other card games, we likely know there is much truth in this statement. The fact is there are situations and circumstances in our lives that we wouldn’t choose but we still have to deal with them.

In Matthew 25:29 (NLT) we read this promise, *“To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.”* Let’s learn how to use well what we have been given, make the right choices, and win with the hand we’ve been dealt.

THE HAND WE'VE BEEN DEALT

THE FIVE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE OUR IDENTITY

Our identity encompasses our individual chemistry, our connections, our circumstances, our consciousness, and our choices. From memories to experiences, relationships to morals, choices to beliefs, our identities are complex and also capable of change.

OUR CHEMISTRY

Psalm 139:14 (NLT) says, *"Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!"* Our chemistry includes not only our chemical makeup as humans but also the physical characteristics which make us all unique. Some of us are short, others tall; some are introverts, others extroverts; and the list goes on. Our brains and bodies are unique, and those distinctions are all part of our chemistry, how we are wired, our custom design by God. We are all God's creation, but different because of our chemistry. Our chemistry also informs our race, ethnicity, and appearance in general, and effects how we see ourselves as well as how others see us and in turn prompts our behaviors, attitudes, and emotions.

OUR CONNECTIONS

Our families, friends, partners, and even acquaintances also play a part in forming our identity. Positive and negative characteristics form as a result of our relationships, particularly those developed in our formative years. Our families have a substantial effect on our identity because they are the first people to whom we are exposed. In a similar manner, we also impact their lives. The size of our families as well as the support (or lack thereof) are also influential factors in our identity. Later, the influence of friends – platonic and romantic – further forms our identity in both positive and negative ways.

OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

It is not surprising to discover our circumstances influence our identity. Our circumstances include not only what happens to us directly but also what happens around us. The culture into which we are born has a huge impact on shaping our behaviors and our identity. We cannot control our circumstances – the culture and society in which we are born and raised nor the traumas (pain, heartaches, rejection, crises, bullying, abuse, and so on) which come into our lives – but each one shapes us throughout our lives. Our culture can be a source of pride or an area of challenge for our identity. Life's troubles, especially those occurring in childhood, may impact our identity negatively but we also have the ability to work through those issues and develop a healthier identity as adults. In like manner, the positive support we receive as children in those challenges can have a positive effect on our identity throughout adulthood.

OUR CONSCIOUSNESS

Our consciousness is how we think about ourselves and includes our memories, feelings, thoughts, self-awareness, and most importantly what we say to ourselves. Yes, we all talk to ourselves, in fact, we do it all of our lives. These conversations make up our habitual thoughts. The sad part is most of the self-talk of these thoughts is often negative. The truth be told, if we talked to our friends the way we talk to ourselves, we would be completely without friends. The Bible confirms the significance of our consciousness in Proverbs 23:7 (NASB) proclaiming, *"For as he thinks within himself, so he is."* What we think of ourselves greatly influences who we are – our identity. God's Word also warns us in Proverbs 4:23 (NCV), *"Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life."* Why is this so important? We have the ability to control our thoughts, our consciousness, and send our lives in a completely different direction.

OUR CHOICES

Our choices and actions influence our identity. Both flow from our beliefs and values. We have the power to choose. Humans, being created in the image of God, have freedom of choice. Depending on our choices, this freedom can be a blessing or a curse. The good news is our choices can make all the difference in our ability to win with the hand we're dealt. Why? While we can't chose our chemistry or our circumstances, or even all of our connections, we can chose how we respond to all that we can't control and in doing so we can change our destiny and win!

THE FIVE WINNING CHOICES FOR THE HAND WE'VE BEEN DEALT

1. WE CAN CHOOSE TO GET HEALTHIER

Knowing that we have freedom to choose, we can choose to get healthier. Often, we don't consider our health until some crisis or illness forces us to consider it. Then we go all in, examining our eating habits, our exercise routine, and more. In Psalm 119:73 (LB), the psalmist prayed, *"You made my body, Lord; now give me sense to heed your laws."* We know God made us in His image, which means we are resilient but God didn't make us to handle the overindulgence of food, alcohol, additives, and other forms of excess. In order to be healthy, we need to follow God's guidelines for good health. In His Word, He has provided sound principles for good health – physical, mental, and spiritual.

All the way back to the days of Moses, God provided rules regarding food, diet, and health. In Leviticus 3:17, He told His people not to consume fat or blood – fast forward to the 20th century when researchers confirmed a diet

high in fat increases health risk (heart disease, cancer, strokes) and contaminated blood transmits diseases (AIDS, hepatitis, and more).

In Proverbs 3:1-8, God tells His people that following His commands brings long life, peace, prosperity, and health. In obeying God's commands, we serve both our health and our bodies. These are just a few examples, but God's Word is filled with instructions for restoring and maintaining health. It shouldn't come as a surprise that God knows what is best for us after all He created us! God wants us to be healthy – spiritually, mentally, and physically. We best serve Him and ourselves when we chose to get healthy and obey His commands. We simply need to make better decisions for our health and in doing so we choose to get healthier!

THE FIVE WINNING CHOICES FOR THE HAND WE'VE BEEN DEALT

2. WE CAN CHOOSE TO DEEPEN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

In Genesis 2:8, God says, *"It is not good for man to be alone!"* The truth is God made humans to be social beings. He created us to want healthy relationships with others. We have access to these important human connections in our relationships not only with family but also with friends. Most importantly we can also choose which of those relationships should be strengthened and which relationships should be let go. We want to strengthen healthy relationships because those relationships are the ones which positively influence our lives. We need to rethink unhealthy relationships with "friends" who aren't reliable or who are of questionable character. Why is this so important? Paul tells us the reason in 1 Corinthians 15:33 (NIV), *"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'"*

In relationships, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:1a (NLT), *"Let love be your highest goal."* He adds more in Ephesians 3:17 (NCV) when he

prays, *"...that Christ will live in your hearts by faith and that your life will be strong in love and be built on love."* Good relationships are valuable, withstanding time, distance, and circumstances. The depth of these relationships makes the connection strong and reliable.

Interestingly enough, God also warns us in regard to toxic relationships and advises us to choose our friends well. The relationships we should seek to deepen are those filled with trust, love, honesty, support, reciprocity, and authenticity. God's Word also tells us how not to choose friends and which relationships we should let go. For example, Proverbs 22:24-25 warns us against relationships with those who can't control their tempers, and 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 tells us to avoid those who are slanderers, promiscuous, predators, drunkards, and criminals. The Bible tells us to seek out and strengthen healthy relationships in which we can find support and grow.

THE FIVE WINNING CHOICES FOR THE HAND WE'VE BEEN DEALT

3. WE CAN CHOOSE TO TRUST GOD

No matter what happens in our lives, we can choose to trust God. The writer of Romans explains, *"God knows us far better than we know ourselves... That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him"* (Romans 8:27-29 (MSG)). God determined from the very beginning to shape our lives as believers and help us become more like Jesus – so we can trust Him in that, but, just what does choosing to trust God mean?

Trusting God is not like trusting another person. People, like all of us, make mistakes, fall short, and fail. God does not! He doesn't lie or fail or make mistakes. God is always present with the help we need so we can trust Him, knowing

He will do all He promised in His Word. Trust is essentially faith in action. When we come to know God and grow in our relationship with Him, our faith increases and we trust Him more. Our faith and trust in Him is demonstrated in our obedience to Him, knowing He is the one on whom we can depend wholeheartedly. Trust is dependence on God – understanding He is always working things out for our good, guiding us and opening all the right doors, meeting our needs, protecting us, and providing for us. Trusting God means believing Him even when we are afraid and our feelings threaten to overwhelm us. In Psalm 34:1 (TLB), David exemplifies what trust in God looks like when he says, *"I will praise the Lord no matter what happens. I will constantly speak of his glories and grace."* Trusting God isn't only for life's greatest challenges but also for the everyday, day to day circumstances we all face. He is faithful in every circumstance, all we need do is make the choice to trust Him.

THE FIVE WINNING CHOICES FOR THE HAND WE'VE BEEN DEALT

4. WE CAN CHOOSE WHAT WE THINK ABOUT

In Proverbs 23:7, we found this truth, *"For as he thinks within himself, so he is"* but the good news is we can choose what we think. God wants to be the focus of our thought life. He tells us in Romans 12:2, *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."* When we let God transform our thought process through His Word and His Spirit, we can better choose what we think about.

Our minds (our thoughts) often pose a big challenge, after all not only do our minds store the good but also the bad – anger, embarrassment, guilt, shame. The good news is with God's help we can overcome those negative thoughts and change the way we think and what we think about. How? When you feed your mind truths from God's Word your thoughts

become more positive and in line with His will for your life. God even provides us with guidance on where to focus our thinking in Philippians 4:8, *"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."*

As believers, we *"have the mind of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:16 (NLT)). In accepting Jesus, we have His mind operating in us through the Holy Spirit. Through His power, we can clean up our thoughts, focus on the positive and choose what we think about. When we do, we learn to act and think like Jesus, our perfect mentor and role model!

THE FIVE WINNING CHOICES FOR THE HAND WE'VE BEEN DEALT

5. WE CAN CHOOSE JESUS AS SAVIOR

We've been talking about all the changes we can make in our lives as believers, but what if you have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior? John 3:16 explains, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* God's great love for us means becoming a Christian is simple. Becoming a believer only requires that we ask for forgiveness, accept Christ as the full sacrifice for our sins, and trust Him as Savior (Acts 16:31). Being a Christian means that through faith we have a personal relationship with Christ, but it doesn't end there.

Once we choose Jesus as our Savior, we also gain the promise found in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *"This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"* When we come to know Christ, we gain eternal life with Him and we are

also made new – transformed to a new creation in Him. As a new person in Christ, we get a fresh start and we are restored to fellowship with God. We no longer belong to ourselves but to Christ, chosen by Him. Our destiny changes as well, we are no longer enemies of God, but His children with a home in heaven. As believers, we have direct access to God and the power of the Holy Spirit living within us. Most importantly, we have a new purpose to share the good news of salvation in Him and to do the good works God has for us to do!

NOW, LET'S MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES AND WIN WITH THE HAND WE'RE DEALT

When we choose to get healthier,
deepen our healthy relationships, trust God
completely, change the way we think, and
accept Jesus as Savior, we have all we need to
win with the hand we've been dealt!

