

Walking by Faith: Living by Your Priorities

[Numbers 22:22-32](#)

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[Real Audio \(2 MB\)](#)

Every life is created with the opportunity to end up as either a blessing or a curse. Which you will be is determined by the ordinary decisions you make along the way.

The Hebrews long journey through the desert wilderness is almost over after 40 years. They are now encamped on the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan River from the Promised Land.

The king of Moab was a man named Balak, the son of Zippor. The king heard that the Hebrews had just defeated the Amorites in battle, and so he was afraid of these strangers who were now encamped in his country. In fact, we are told that all of Moab "was in great dread of the people because they were so numerous." According to a census that would soon be taken, the Hebrews numbered over 600,000. Since that counted just the men who could go to war, the total number of people was in the millions. So you can understand why the Moabites were anxious about having millions of Hebrews, who had already demonstrated their capability in battle, suddenly in their country. King Balak was terrified. So he tried to get some divine help from God.

Living in the area was a man named Balaam who was a diviner, a seer, a fortune teller. Balaam was not a Hebrew, but he knew how to pray and listen to their God. So the frightened King Balak sends the frightened elders of Moab to Balaam's house, "with the fees of divination in their hands." By the way, this combination of fear and money is always dangerous. When you spend your money out of fear it never leads to a blessing. If King Balak had wanted to be a blessing, he would have had to rise above his fears. So do we.

When the elders get to Balaam's house, they show him the money and ask him to come to the king and curse the Hebrews. Given his line of work, Balaam was probably accustomed to putting curses on people. But to curse millions of Hebrews was asking a lot. So he said, "I don't know. I'll have to pray about it." He does and God tells him, "Absolutely not. You cannot go with these men to curse the Hebrews because I have already blessed them." So Balaam tells the elders of Moab, "Sorry. But I can't go." In response, King Balak sends more officials with the offer of still more money.

You get the feeling that Balaam really wants to accept this offer. He keeps talking about how much money the king could give him. In the New Testament epistle of Jude, we are told that Balaam was motivated by greed. But he knows better than to go against God. So he prays again, asking God if he could go to the king and perform just this one little curse. Surprisingly, God lets him go. If you keep asking God to let you waste your life just collecting money, he will. It is a curse against God and it is a curse against your own life, but if that is your choice, God will let you do that. At least for a while.

The next morning, Balaam saddles his donkey and heads for Moab. Now he doesn't think that he is cursing God. Like us, he's been praying to God about his choices, why would he want to curse God? Balaam thinks he's just going to put a hex on the strange Hebrews who are bothering everybody. So in his mind this is just another job for which he will receive another fee. But the text makes it clear that he is on the road to being a curse to God.

Blessing or cursing? That is the fundamental choice every one of us has to make with how we will use life. A curse is a way of profaning that which was meant to be sacred. Your life was meant to be so sacred that through it we get a glimpse of the bliss, or blessing, of heaven. But when we distort things from their sacred purpose, we turn the blessing into cursing. A curse word is a profaning of language, and a cursed life is a profaning of its sacred calling.

When we gather in this sanctuary for your funeral and people stand to give your eulogy, what will they say? Will they essentially say that your life was a blessing or a curse? Be clear, in the end no one will rise up and call you blessed because you collected a lot of money. If that is all you have done, if you have wasted your life because like Balak you were afraid and tried to buy security or because like Balaam you begged God to let you get a little more money, then your life will be a curse to God.

No one wants to join Balaam on the road to being a curse to God. No one wants to profane life or to distort it for purposes other than that for which we were created. We want to be a blessing. But we just keep ending up on the wrong road.

If I were to ask you what your priorities in life are, you would say they are your family, health, and opportunities to be of service. If, like Balaam, you are a man or woman who prays to God, you would certainly claim that the ministry of the church is also a priority for you. It is a way that you receive the blessings of God, and a means for being a blessing. But if I were to ask you to examine where your money is going, how much of it is spent on these priorities and how much of it is spent on things that are not important to you? Think of it as two pie charts. One measures your priorities and the other illustrates your expenditures of income. Why don't these charts match?

The problem isn't with our hearts. We've got wonderful hearts, but we have somehow landed on the wrong road that is preventing us from using our money to fund our priorities. But that also means we are not fulfilling our calling to be a blessing. And if you are not using your money to be a blessing, you are a curse to God. It's the only other option.

Again, no one intends on cursing God. But the officials of Moab keep distracting us from the voice of God in our lives. The officials of Moab confront us with hundreds of advertisements every day that promise their product will make us happy. Then to help us grab these products, the officials of Moab keep sending us letters offering to place another credit card in our hands. Right on the envelope it says that you are already approved, and it feels so good to be approved. But before we know it, we are horrified to discover how much of our disposable income is going to service debt. All in order to buy a lot of stuff that hasn't done a thing to make us really happy.

Then, after the officials of Moab get us deep into debt, they offer us jobs that pay more so we can service that debt. But the demands of the job eat up all our time and pull us further away from the priorities of the heart. So now we are stuck with a job we don't like, but have to keep to afford a lifestyle that we don't really like either! The day we realize this is the day the cursing starts. We curse on our way to work, we curse throughout our work, and we certainly curse on our drive home from work.

You have got to take control! I'm not telling you to give all your money to the church. I'm telling you to stop being a victim. Take control of your life, which in the words of Jesus means putting your money where you heart is. Fund your priorities. If the church is among those priorities, then give to it. Give to the other missions, ministries, and programs that are important to you. But stop saying, "I wish I could do more." If that is really true, then give more. The money is in your hands; you're the steward of it. You can do what you want with it. Blessing or cursing? It's up to you.

If like Balaam, you have somehow wandered onto the wrong road with money and don't know how to get off, the good news is that God will keep interrupting your path. As Balaam road his donkey to Moab, an angel of the Lord appeared on the road wielding a huge sword. Balaam didn't see it, but the donkey did, so it veered off the road into the field. Balaam became irritated and struck the donkey to get it back on the road. Farther down the road, at a pass between the rock walls, the angel appeared again. Again Balaam missed it, but seeing the angel the donkey pushed against the rocks, hurting its rider. So again Balaam struck the donkey. A third time the angel appeared at a narrow place in the road. This time the donkey just laid down. And for a third time Balaam struck his donkey in anger.

Both the Lord and the donkey had had enough of this, so God opened the mouth of the donkey who said, "Cut it out, will you?" Balaam was so angry at the donkey he wasn't impressed that it was speaking. He just said, "It's a good thing for you I don't have a sword." Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, the seer, so he could see the angel. Now Balaam fell to the ground saying, "I have sinned against God." You

can imagine that this was the first time a donkey was ever heard saying, "Amen."

If you persist on the wrong road, the road that leads to cursing, God can use anything to get your attention. The stuff you keep buying will break. The new homes and cars are never going to be good enough. The new job that you have to have to afford all this stuff is going to suck away your soul. When these things happen, you can get angry, or you can see what is so obvious. Any dumb donkey can see this road is leading to your destruction. Pay attention to the malaise in your soul. It's telling you to fall to the ground and beg God for help.

After his confession, Balaam was sent by the angel on to Moab. Only instead of cursing the Hebrews, he blessed them three times from the mountaintops. Of course he lost his fat fee, but he received something of far greater value. He got to be a blessing.

If you want to take control of your life and turn it back into a blessing, the place to begin is by falling on your face and confessing that you are out of control. The angels of God will take it from there. They will show you how to make the tough decisions about reallocating your resources. They will raise you up to sacred purposes. They will turn your fear into faith and your curses into blessings.

Lord God, we do confess that we have indeed wandered onto the wrong road. So by your grace, lift us up again to invest our lives into the things that will make us a blessing to you. Amen.