

Let me tell you a story about a carrot and a horse. The story is from Tim Keller's book *The Prodigal God*:

Once upon a time there was a gardener who grew an enormous carrot. So he took it to his king and said, "My Lord, this is the greatest carrot I've ever grown or ever will grow. Therefore I want to present it to you as a token of my love and respect for you."

The king was touched and discerned the man's heart, so as [the gardener] turned to go the king said, "Wait! You are clearly a good steward of the earth. I own a plot of land right next to yours. I want to give it to you freely as a gift so you can garden it all." And the gardener was amazed and delighted and went home rejoicing.

But there was a nobleman at the king's court who overheard all this. And he said, "My! If that is what you get for a carrot—what if you gave the king something better?" So the next day the nobleman came before the king and he was leading a handsome black stallion.

He bowed low and said, "My lord, I breed horses and this is the greatest horse I have ever bred or ever will. Therefore I want to present it to you as a token of my love and respect for you." But the king discerned his heart and said thank you, and took the horse and merely dismissed him. The nobleman was perplexed. So the king said, "Let me explain. That gardener was giving me the carrot, but you were giving yourself the horse." Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God*, p. 60

I've found myself in that story more often than I would like to admit; and it's not in the role of the gardener. Like the nobleman I often approach God not for what I can give God but for what I believe God will give me.

Like the nobleman in the parable, I bring to God that which I want God to bless so that I will be rewarded. It is the ultimate act of selfishness- seeking God's blessing on my work rather than seeking to know how God is working so that I can join God.

Now at first it sounds good to say that I want God to bless what I am doing-what I'm offering to God; but when I seek God's blessing on my endeavor rather than seeking to honor God by doing God's will then I've got the whole blessing thing backwards.

Tell me I'm not alone in this!

Can you relate to what I'm saying; that we get the proverbial cart before the horse by asking God's blessing after we've already decided what we are going to do.

Here's a good example. How many of you get up in the morning and say your prayers something like this: "God be with me and bless my day. I'm going to do this and that and would be most thankful if you'd bless what I'm doing today."

Or, maybe you can relate to this. You work real hard to plot and plan what you believe is the right next step for you to take. Then when you are done you pray, “God bless this endeavor and make my efforts successful.”

So like the parable of the gardener and the nobleman we often find ourselves seeking to be blessed by the king rather than seeking to bless the king- we seek our own good [our own will] first rather than seeking God first and doing God’s will.

What we are learning throughout our study of Experiencing God is that while we follow this very natural path (a path we could describe simply as self-centered) it is flawed because we begin our search for knowing and doing the will of God from the wrong motive/perspective.

No one put this wrong motive/perspective in simpler terms than Rick Warren did in his best-seller, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Anyone remember the opening line of the book?

That’s right, the opening line simply says: “It’s not about you.” Then he goes on to say:

“The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God.” *The Purpose Driven Life, Day 1*

The challenge you and I will face this week in reading the daily lessons in Experiencing God is to get the right perspective, the right motive so that we understand the purpose of our life. And that means being willing first and foremost to admit that we trust ourselves more than we trust God and consequently miss out on the blessing of God.

Trusting ourselves is not an unfamiliar concept for anyone. When we look around our natural inclination is to trust what we can see. And since we spend most of our time looking in the mirror at ourselves we tend to judge a situation based on what we bring to the table.

So when we are faced with a challenge in our life- a ‘What should I do now moment’; we look at ourselves and what we bring to the challenge and plow ahead. Only after we find ourselves up to our necks in trouble do we stop and think God where are you?

Our key verse for this week is a great reminder that where we place our trust matters. Now before we read this verse just a note about Psalm 20. Psalm 20 is a prayer for the king of Israel just before he goes out to battle against a threatening force. And as any king would do when he assembles his troops his natural inclination is to look around and see the size of his army. But in Israel the king is reminded that the battle belongs to the Lord. And the battle is not about who has the numbers or the superior weapons; but in whom the king and his army trust.

Read Psalm 20:7 along with me:

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

Now chariots and horses were the superior weapons of war in ancient days and so it was natural that a king would trust in those. But we don't live in ancient Israel; we live in the 21st century. So what would we say we trust in? How would you rewrite the first half of verse 7?

Some trust in... and some in...[solicit answers]

[all together now; "but we trust in the name of the Lord our God!"]

Let's go back to the parable to pull this altogether. The nobleman in the story thought first of himself. He acted in a way that he thought would honor the king; but ultimately his purpose was selfish. The nobleman trusted in himself and sought to gain more for himself by giving the king the gift of his horse. That points to the fact that the nobleman's relationship with the king was based on what he could get from the king not how he could honor the king.

But the gardener got it right. His motivation was anything but selfish. After he gave the king the carrot he was ready to walk away. He didn't come looking for anything from the king. And because he was not selfish his actions demonstrated that he trusted the king and was acting in a way that honored the king. As a result of all this; the king blessed the gardener. And when the gardener left he knew exactly what the king wanted him to do and he went out and did it with joy!

So have you got the picture? Do you understand how selfishness leads us to place our trust in the wrong person, namely ourselves?

Let me go back to something I asked you about earlier. How does the first prayer of your day begin? Does it sound like what I suggested earlier: "God be with me and bless my day. I'm going to do this and that and would be most thankful if you'd bless what I'm doing today."

Might I suggest a change of perspective for your first prayer of the morning?

First, stop asking God to be with you. God is already where you are and wherever you will be throughout your day. So start your prayer by simply acknowledging the fact that God is already with you.

Now comes the fun part! You already know that God is at work all around you; so why not make yourself available to God. Remember that your life isn't about you and what

you want; it is about making yourself available to God. So you might start off by saying “Today God, I want to be available to you.”

Then you can get onto the next part by asking God to help you recognize what God is doing around you. So you might pray something like: “Help me to see and to recognize your activity all around me. Give me eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to feel the needs of others in whom you are working.”

So once you’ve made yourself available to God and sought to recognize God’s activity; here comes the hard part. Now you need to pray for the obedience to step in and join with God in His activity. And so your prayer may sound something like this: “As I see you at work God, help me to be obedient by joining you in that work.”

Now if you are willing to trust God and pray that prayer each morning I can assure you that you will be on the path to knowing and doing the will of God and most assuredly you will experience God in a whole new way in your life and in the life of others where God is at work.

And what is most exciting is imagining what God is going to do through each and every one of us this week. The lives that will be impacted, the hope that will be inspired and most importantly the mission of God accomplished because his disciples were obedient to the prompting and leading of God.

My prayer for you this week is that you find yourself more like the gardener than the nobleman and that in the process of trusting God you come to surrender your will to the will of God.