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How to Get Good Breaks in Life

Everybody wants to know this...



“How to Get Good Breaks in Life”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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You've seen this happen, perhaps more than once. Some young player, virtually an unknown, makes an unexpected brilliant play. Suddenly the stands roar with praise of him. "He got a good break," fans say.

Take another example. I spoke with a minister who had at that time one of the largest churches in North America.

"Tell me," I asked, "how you account for this phenomenal growth?" I did not know him to be a great preacher.

"Well, Bob," he replied, "I was in the right place at the right time. This area was about to take off in a population explosion. The church was ripe for growth. Then I came along. I got some good breaks."

Is this the answer, really?

The Bible speaks of "the issues of life" that we might term "the breaks." We ought to pay some attention to them.

To begin, we need to define our terms. To most people, "good breaks" are things that occur spontaneously and lead to some spectacular successes. This state of euphoria is nowhere guaranteed in the Word of God. Moreover, we are talking here, not about just anybody but specifically about the child of God who by faith in Jesus Christ is already a candidate for an "abundant" - a superbly good-life. The Lord Jesus said:

"I am come that they might have life and have it MORE ABUNDANTLY" (John 10:10b).

Yes, beloved, God wants the BEST for you. He already has put into operation a plan whereby you can realize and enjoy that best. Read again the blessed statement of fact in Romans 8:28.

Again, in this context we define success, achievement, advancement as being the "best" from God's viewpoint. It may or may not be our point of view.

Incidentally, these "good breaks" are sometimes difficult for us to identify. Job probably thought that any such advantages surely had bypassed him. But what did he get ultimately? Besides doubled material gains, he won a place in the divine record that has brought comfort to countless thousands of suffering souls down through the years - no small honor. He came to see himself as he never had before *"I abhor myself, and repent"* - Job 42:61.

He was actually enabled to pray for his tormentors - for their good and his. He foresaw the great truth of the resurrection (*"In my flesh shall I see God"*- Job 19:26). Best of all, he served as an instrument in God's hand to silence Satan's threats and manifest God's power. Wouldn't you say that Job got a few "good breaks"?

As we come to this subject the Book of Proverbs gives us this starting clue:

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

"Issues" in the King James Version are variously defined in other versions as springs, influences, etc.

How shall we go about making our own those good things that we have been promised? The first rule is:

Begin On The Inside

We shall see that destiny is determined, not by circumstances but by the kind of person we are on the inside.

Be Watchful

Keep thy heart. One paraphrase of these words is this: "Above all else, guard your affections, for they influence everything else in your life."

In other words; watch your inner life, the place where the real "you" lives. Be aware of the things that attract you, about which you think deeply. Monitor your imaginations, your emotions, your desires. Pay attention to these things, because the "breaks" of life grow out of them.

Remember - your reaction to the blows that strike you is what counts. And over the long haul, the success or failure of your outer life will be decided by what you are inside.

You see an individual whose career seems suddenly to go to pieces. You say, "He certainly has had a lot of hard luck." But if you could look searchingly into all of that person's past, you might find that there were stages of deterioration-perhaps imperceptible-coming along in that person's life. You might notice one small compromise built upon another, so that the inner life of that individual was being affected for a long, long time.

Then there occurred the violent upheaval of a demotion or dismissal, or a physical or mental weakening, or the tragedy of a divorce.

Because the individual had trouble coping with such pressures as these, he attributes them to "bad breaks." But actually no circumstance could have downed him, if his practice had been the daily appropriation of divine strength and wisdom.

Everything that you and I will ever need has been provided for us in Christ:
"God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

God's supply is adequate for every circumstance that may befall us. We live less than victoriously only because we do not lay hold of that which He has made so readily available.

In this matter of attention to the inner man, we need to consider the whole phrase:
Keep thy heart WITH ALL DILIGENCE.

Be Thorough-Going

The dictionary defines "diligent" as "characterized by steady, earnest, energetic application and effort." The word also carries the idea of persistence: stay with whatever task you have undertaken until it is complete, finished.

If you clean the house diligently, you keep at it until the place is really clean - however long it takes or however much the family complains of inconvenience.

I once had occasion to visit my dentist with a tooth that troubled me. He sized up the situation and began drilling. (Those were the old days when more pain was associated with the process than today.) I soon thought I had had enough, and when the dentist gave me opportunity to talk I said, "You know, Doc, I don't need one of your superb jobs. Can't you just take a short cut and give me a filling and let me be on my way?"

He looked at me sternly and said, "I can't stop - not until every bit of decay is removed, and the job is *right*."

He was so earnest about it that I have always remembered that concept. We need to exercise that kind of diligence with regard to our inner lives.

We are looking at what the Bible calls “the issues of life,” and what we sometimes term “the breaks.” We have seen that our attitude and behavior have a large part in what “happens” to us, and certainly in our reaction to it. This truth is summed up in the injunction, “Keep [guard] thy heart” - your innermost self. Here is another guideline:

Work At Being A Godly Person

“Exercise thyself unto godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). That was Paul’s advice to Timothy, and to us.

It must not be supposed that if you are “good” (by whatever standard) everything will turn out in your favor and you will have a bed of roses. But if your heart is kept right toward God - that relationship yields only blessing and “no good thing will he [God] withhold from them who walk uprightly.” So what do we do?

Work at bringing God into all the ordinaries of life, not in some pious display, but in a quiet, normal, non-threatening manner.

Look at your daily schedule. Are you making the separate parts of it a matter for prayer - first as you being the day with God and then hour by hour, silently, as you move through each busy detail? (This is not formal devotion; it is outbreathing to God and inbreathing of His strength and grace.) Have you learned to pray your way through the day? If you have, it is because you have made up your mind that you will do this. It didn’t just happen.

Nobody drifts into holy living. Oh, yes, you and I are saved by grace through faith plus nothing.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us ... through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5, 6).

But with that transaction completed, we must consciously stay within the boundaries of God’s will for us - and that takes effort.

A good example is found in the prophet Daniel. Here he was, faced with the strange and binding law that prayer was to be offered only to the emperor.

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, AS HE DID PREVIOUSLY” (Dan. 6:10).

Daniel was so accustomed to taking to God in prayer all the everyday affairs of his life that he had no trouble praying about the sudden life threatening edict that rocked his world.

The routine of letting God into all the ordinary affairs of your daily life is something that will pay high dividends. Carelessness at this level may result in compromise that seems minor at first. But it may end in a defeat that may be devastating.

Learn To Program The Computer Of Your Mind

“Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). Your mind is a great computer, far more complex than anything that has been built mechanically by engineers. Your mind has billions of electrical connections. They can relate to one another in a way that allows for reason, for judgment, to take place - something that manufactured computers are not able to do, at least not yet.

How it Works

How do you get anything from the printed page into your mind? You read it. You memorize it. You meditate upon it, that is, you turn it over and over in your thoughts. Then you let go of it, consciously or not, and it promptly becomes apart of your unconscious mind that we are calling your computer.

This process takes place regardless of the nature of the subject matter to be learned. If you are a Christian and you follow this course, putting the Word of God into your mind, you will find that the faithful Holy Spirit who lives in every believer now can bring into focus that thought, that word, that command, that comforting passage that you learned earlier, at the very time that it is needed.

So do this: Learn a verse, at least one a week. Write it on a card or slip of paper. Put it in your wallet or tack it on the wall, perhaps above the sink. Learn the words. Then experience the sheer joy of having the Holy Spirit bring to your mind, some time later, the portion you have committed to memory.

This is the thought of Proverbs, chapter 4. Solomon is speaking, but the overall message is one from God Himself to each of us.

“Attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are LIFE unto those that find them” (Prov. 4:20-22).

What to Do

Every computer comes with a manual of instructions. Often the help of an instructor goes along with the purchase. As a believer, you have the Word of God (the manual) and the Holy Spirit (the teacher).

As you proceed to learn you will find that one of the secrets of success with your new “equipment” is the use of what we might call “dead time” - a few seconds here and there where nothing is being demanded of you. If you look for them it may surprise you to find how many such free moments you have, even in the midst of the activity-packed day.

Instead of picking up the nearest paper or magazine, you can use that time to recall the Scripture that you put into your “computer” that morning. This is an enriching and relaxing experience that I long for you to have.

You computer operators know that at the outset you turn on the machine and enter your particular password, so that your terminal is hooked up to the main frame. The first thing that comes on we call a “menu.” That’s a list of different things the computer is prepared to do for you at that time, given the amount of software that’s plugged into it.

Philippians, chapter 4, helps here. Note the emphasis on the MIND. Verse 7 ends: *“Keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

Verse 8 ends: *“Think on these things.”*

Between those two commands is the “menu” for the computer of your mind:

“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

The “dead time,” or any time that is given to storing God’s Word in your mind and heart will payoff.

Results

I spoke recently to a person who had gone through any number of rehabilitation programs, seeking relief from alcoholism. Nothing worked. As I looked at him, he appeared to be in fine shape, physically and mentally.

“Well, now,” I said, “you seem to be doing all right. What made the difference?”

“Oh Bob,” he replied, “it was putting the Word of God in my heart.”

He began quoting one Scripture portion after another, each one related to the subject we were discussing. The computer of his mind, stored with the Word of God, had made him the victor over a disabling habit, when other means had failed.

Attention ... Concentration ... Decision

Your inner life is affected by the things to which you pay attention. And it is that inner life, we have seen, that prepares you-makes you ready-for ANY circumstance that may come your way.

Again, your inner life is affected by the things you ponder. That is a word we do not use often.

“Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established” (Prov. 4:26).

The dictionary defines “ponder”: to weigh, to deliberate, to muse over, to think or consider quietly, soberly, and deeply.” The process can achieve either bad or good results.

Newspapers carried the story of a young man in California who stabbed his foster sister to death. With blood still on his person, he handed over to the sheriff the knife with which he had committed the crime and said calmly, “I’ve been thinking about this for a year.”

On the positive side, if you will think about the will of God and the Word of God, about His purpose and His love-if you will do this on a continuing basis-your life will be enriched and established.

We all hope for success, the “good breaks,” as we say. The only place that word “success” is used in the Bible is in Joshua 1:8, and it has to do with meditating on the Word of God:

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good SUCCESS.”

You want success? You want fruitfulness? You want durability and the capacity to “take it”? You want the fulfillment of the phrase in the First Psalm, “Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper”?

Then get the Word of God to work in your life. Those eternal principles will determine your reaction to circumstances and you will find yourself being a real success, in the fullest sense of the word.

In addition to attention and concentration we need to give thought to decision-making.

“Turn not to the right hand or to the left. Remove thy foot from evil” (Prov. 4:27).

Obviously, if you turn one way or the other you have made a decision to do so. If you were to keep a log of all the decisions made in the course of a day - conscious and unconscious - the entries would fill a large book. The fact is that we pray about very few of them. Yet the Word of God enjoins us:

“In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).

“Everything” means EVERYTHING. You “keep your heart” (which is what we are talking about) by praying your way through the day, by silently taking to God the small matters as well as the larger decisions as they come along.

Small thought here: Don’t suppose that prayer is necessarily a formula for getting what you want. We hear the complaint, “I prayed so hard about thus - and - thus. And look what happened!”

Sometimes God allows us to get into circumstances that are not at all to our liking. But if we pray, the end result is sure to be even better than we hoped for.

I am acquainted with a husband and wife team who were interested in a work change. They made the possibility a matter of prayer. The husband would retire from the firm where he was employed, and together these two would start a little business that seemed just right for them. They talked to me about their situation and we prayed together about it.

Events followed very much in the way they had planned. The business had a Christian connotation, but for some reason the project never really got off the ground. Then came the inevitable question: “Why did this happen? We prayed about every step of the way.”

A year or so passed and I met them again.

“Oh,” they said, “we’re with such-and-such group (naming a fine missionary organization). And you know what?” they continued, “We thank God for what at first appeared to be a failure. We learned from that experience. What is more, it positioned us right where we needed to be in

order to make this new connection.”

It took God a couple of years to shift the circumstances around to where His servants were ready for the “good thing” He planned.

Learn How To Handle Temptation

Many a person has missed the so-called “good breaks” in life because he has yielded to one or another of Satan’s insidious suggestions.

Temptation - Plausible

The classic illustration of the plausibility of Satan’s claims is in the early chapters of Genesis. Satan talked to Eve something like this: “I can’t believe my ears! Are you saying God has told you that you must not eat of one of the trees in this beautiful garden? How repressive can one get?”

“Why,” he went on, “God knows that the day you eat of that tree you will be just like He is, knowing good and evil.”

The record states that when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the eyes and a tree desired to make one wise, she took thereof and did eat and gave to her husband and he did eat.

Satan’s arguments are always presented as being pleasant and good and something that will better you. But they are always lies.

“When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44b).

Anything that seeks to bypass the law, or that is contrary to the Word and the will of God and the direction of the Holy Spirit, is sure to come to a bitter end.

Temptation - Disappointing

“All the devil’s apples,” said John R. Rice, “have worms in them.” However attractive may be the outside of what he offers you, inside is disgusting reality.

There are no radiantly happy unsaved old people. The only way to grow old beautifully is to have faith in Almighty God as a working principle of your life.

The servant of Elisha, Gehazi, lacked that kind of deportment. When his master was instrumental in the healing of Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Syria, Gehazi saw the opportunity to make a fast buck, as we would say. He ran after the departing officer and made up a plausible but untrue way to approach him. He said:

“My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of raiment” (2 Ki. 5:22).

Overjoyed at the opportunity to show gratitude to Elisha, his benefactor, Naaman urged Gehazi to accept even more than he had requested. But the servant of Elisha never lived to enjoy those benefits. Why? Because the request was rooted in covetousness and deceit which God cannot countenance.

Does that mean, therefore, that I must not aspire to being a sharp businessman? Not necessarily (though it is still true that the LOVE of money is the root of all evil).

What we need to remember here is that any temptation to make a profit by the involvement of even the slightest degree of shady dealing is doomed to failure.

When we succumb to temptation we are affected adversely in at least one other way.

Temptation - A Threat To Straight Thinking

In Proverbs 5, Solomon is talking specifically about the man-woman relationship. But without doing any violence to the text we can enlarge the horizon of our perception to realize that the principles set forth here are applicable to all of life.

“Lest thou shouldest ponder the way of life her ways (the ways of deterrents) are unstable” (Prov. 5:6).

When is our thinking unstable? When we concentrate on having our own way, and we are thus often rendered confused and impotent. On the other hand, when we specialize in doing the will of God, as revealed in the Word of God, we are enabled to evaluate properly and to make decisions in a meaningful manner.

Who needs help in this matter of straight thinking? We all do!

What about the young person, involved in some crime that has landed him in jail? He tells you, “I never thought it would come to this.” Of course not. He didn’t think at all- not much

about the present and not about any eventuality. He was busy gratifying his own desires.

Some Practical Suggestions

First, don't wait until temptation strikes before you get ready for it. The military forces of our country engage regularly in what they call "training maneuvers." The purpose of these courses is to get our men ready to cope with the real thing, if and when they encounter it. Such a program was televised in the eastern part of the United States recently. Viewers were shown how fire departments, police departments, harbor personnel, rescue vessels and experts in communication all worked together in coping with very possible (although simulated) tragedy.

Settle it in your mind: You WILL meet with testing and temptation.

"Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to STAND" (Eph. 6:13).

Second, give Christ control of all the areas of your life-including your weak points. Most of us know pretty well at least some of the areas of weakness that we have: temper, uncontrolled thoughts, love of ease or money, jealousy, an unforgiving spirit. Would you bring to your Savior the areas of your life in which you can expect to be tested? The moment you are faced with a crisis breathe a prayer. You will never reach for any of those objects that are calculated to destroy you-a drink, a cigarette, a marijuana joint, a hypodermic needle, an illicit relationship - while you are praying, "Lord Jesus, help me NOW. I'm Yours." The way to get ready for victory over temptation is to turn over all of your life, including your known weak points, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do this, not once and for all, but day after day.

What about the motorist who willfully exceeds the known speed limit - a minor infraction, to be sure. If he is a Christian and does this, he is concerned chiefly about where he wants to be, and not about his testimony among those who observe him. His thinking is unstable.

Most of us think far too lightly of what sin is. Sin costs lost honor, lost wealth, lost opportunity.

A man came to me and said, "You know that a few years ago I was in the pastorage. But I had an affair and had to leave the ministry. I've repented of my sins. My wife has forgiven me. I am faithful to her and we have a happy home. I just don't understand why I can't get back into Christian leadership."

Justice and compassion aside, I have to tell you, beloved, sin destroys opportunity. Some doors will always be closed after certain actions have taken place.

There is forgiveness with God. There may be also a new start, for our God is full of compassion. But whoever yields to the temptation to sin will pay a price.

The person who has learned to “handle temptation” is very likely to be one to whom the “good breaks” will come, for he will be in line for them because of his maintained relation to Jesus Christ.

Third, regard all testing as an opportunity for God to work a miracle. I’m confident that many of the things we grumble about as being “bad breaks” could be turned into great triumphs if we would simply look heavenward and say, “Okay, Lord, here’s a chance for YOU to work. I yield to You.”

I have told the following story on other occasions, but it bears repeating, and somebody who hasn’t heard it may stand in need of it.

A friend of mine was driving through downtown Baltimore one Saturday afternoon. With two other fellows, he was bound for a Christian Businessmen’s meeting some distance away.

Suddenly, in the middle of an intersection, the gear shift lever came off in his hand. There he was—in low gear, with no ability to shift out of it. Clearing the intersection, he pulled to the side of the highway. There was a service station near by, so he inquired where he could get repairs for his German car.

The attendant told him, “There’s a dealer about a mile from here. But he’s closed. It’s Saturday afternoon, you know.”

The two passengers looked a little glum, fearing they would miss the meeting altogether. But our brother bowed his head and prayed aloud something like this: “Lord Jesus, we want to thank You for the miracle that You have in mind for us. Hallelujah. Amen.

The motor was still running, and with the car in low gear they crept down the street to the dealership. Sure enough, the place was locked up tight.

But from a service station across the street an attendant shouted, you need some help?”

“We sure do,” Hill laughed.

“I’ve got a phone number that might rouse somebody. Want me to call for you?”

“Yes, please do.”

The call was made, and within a matter of minutes the manager of the dealership came from his home, opened up the garage section, ran the car in, put it on a lift, and in a very short time had it repaired.

My friend said to the manager, "We're so grateful to you for what you have done for us. You know, we prayed that God would work a miracle, and you are part of His answer to that prayer."

The three men went on their way, had a great meeting, and returned home without further incident.

When our friend Hill got to his office he wrote a letter to the manufacturer in Germany. "I want to thank you," he said, "for the kind of people you put in dealerships here in America" - and he told the story of what had happened with his gear shift lever, and how the three men had prayed.

After a few days, a letter came back - in fact two letters. The corporate official did reply, but before his message came there was one from his secretary. She wrote something like this:

"Dear Mr. Hill: It is my job to open the mail for my boss, to scan the contents to determine priority, and have things laid out neatly for him when he gets to the office.

"Your letter came across my desk, and I read it. I wonder if you know anybody in Germany who could talk to me about Jesus. I have been trying to find someone who could tell me about Him."

Mr. Hill answered promptly: "Indeed we do know somebody who can help you, somebody right down the street from you. Her name is So-and-so," and he gave the address.

The two women got together, and the lady who had been recommended led her new friend to the Lord.

Thus it was that from the middle of Baltimore to a street in Germany, God worked His wonderful miracle, using a broken gear shift lever to bring somebody to Jesus Christ as Lord.

We would all do well to regard our so-called "bad breaks" as opportunities for God to work.

