

The Lawyer's Verdict

"What are you planning to do now?" the lawyer asked as I signed my new will. My old one had listed my parents, now dead, as beneficiaries.

I hadn't expected that question on this, my last appointment at Mr. Potter's modest, file-stacked office. I felt my face redden, the frustrations of the past year surging through my thoughts.

"I guess I'll take care of the house until it sells," I sighed. For 10 months I had poured myself into emptying out and sprucing up the house my parents had willed me and my married sister. Mr. Potter had guided me through the labyrinth of probate.

Mr. Potter paused, shuffled a folder, then declared, "I think you should head back to graduate school."

I snapped back with several objections. A vacant house was vulnerable to vandalism, and we wanted to sell it, not rent it. But with interest rates high and still rising, the house wasn't apt to sell soon. Plus, I dipped into my college savings for my living expenses – I didn't have the money for tuition. Furthermore, the school was more than halfway across the nation, and the term started in two weeks.

Mr. Potter looked at me again, like a father to a daughter. "I still think you should get back to school."

I drove home bewildered, wondering if my dream of a graduate degree could still be God's will. I could make a living with my current skills, but for years, I'd felt that God expected greater things of me. In my field, a master's degree was a clear asset.

That's why two years earlier I had applied to a Christian graduate school. I almost hadn't – my confidence was so eroded by a broken relationship and job frustrations that I wondered if I could handle graduate work. Thirty and single, I felt agitated because I still had not settled professionally.

But I had decided to set the goal and go for it. I

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Too Good to be True

My stomach insisted on knowing what was going on. Nothing had come down the chute for three days, and all its rumbling warning signs had been ignored.

Two jobs. Two opportunities to do what I wanted to do with my life. That was one opportunity too many for a young man with a history of seeing both sides of every issue.

Lists. Yes, *that's it*, I decided. A list of pros and cons for each job should help clarify matters. California: sun, teaching at my alma mater, sun, my family, sun, old friends, good students and colleagues, sun. Minnesota: seasons, good school and colleagues, my wife's family, skiing, new friends.

Hmm. Not that helpful. Try again. California: cost of housing, crowds, cults, cost of housing. Minnesota: cold, mosquitoes, road repair (the season coming between the winters), cold.

Lists weren't working. I realized I found too much attractive about each opportunity. And my wife, Jayne, wasn't saying much. Was she going through a brief submissive phase? Did she not want to take the blame for a wrong choice? Did she simply have faith that it would all work out?

Obviously the key was to find out what God thought. Fasting, I recalled, was part of the process by which God often reveals His will to those who seek Him. I had fasted before, but never for more than a day and never for anything that required an immediate outcome.

Two days stretched into three. Still no sense of revelation.

Reading Scripture was part of the process, too, I remembered, though I wasn't sure exactly where to start or what to look for. I spent time reading anyway, trying not to twist passages into symbolic allusions to my dilemma. Any possibility that God was sending messages in Ecclesiastes ("light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun") was clouded by Proverbs ("like the coolness of

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lived frugally in a musty basement bedroom, banking most of my paychecks for college expenses.

Just two months before I was to start graduate studies, however, my mother died of cancer. My father was devastated.

Was God telling me to stay home with him? Godly friends, reminding me that we must each work out our own grief, urged me to go ahead with my plans for school.

I had barely begun my graduate program when my father suddenly died of a heart attack. He had designated me to handle his affairs, so I dropped out of school and moved home. Struggling through Dad's documents and bills, I knew I needed a trustworthy lawyer – but whom? My father distrusted the one who drew up his will.

In my grieving, I dipped deeply into Scripture for the help I needed. A month after Dad's death I read Psalm 10:17,18 and wrote in my journal: "You, Father, hear the cry of the fatherless and oppressed. I qualify... and You care!"

A few days later I underlined poignant portions

*"I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."
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of Psalm 27:13,14: "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

The message was clear: Wait and see God work.

A few weeks later I got a call from a financial planner connected to my college. I'd forgotten how the graduate school dean and his wife had prayed with me the night my father died. Sensing my insecurities about the legal work ahead, the dean had promised to put me in touch with someone who could recommend a Christian lawyer. Thus, the planner's call.

Now the lawyer whom the planner recommended had posed the frustrating, pivotal question. With the work of death done, how should I move ahead with life? Psalm 27 said to wait, but now was I waiting too long?

A comment from J.R. Miller in an old devotional classic spoke of my dilemma: "There are times when our strength is to sit still, but there are also times when we are to go forward with a firm step."

Prodded by the lawyer's well-timed question, I stepped out in faith. In two weeks I was back at college. My parents' home didn't sell until after I had finished my master's degree, but God provided short-term jobs to help pay tuition and housing, and then gave me a full-time job at graduation.

I did see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, thanks to a caring lawyer who opened my eyes.

by Jeanne Zornes

Too Good to be True (continued)

snow at harvest time is the trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters”).

Of course, I also prayed. I was ashamed to realize that I spent more time in prayer over this decision than when interceding for other people's problems or praising God for His grace.

But no answer.

I felt a growing frustration. God, it seemed, was playing a shell game under my nose. The shells whisked rapidly between His fingers and around each other. The pea was under one of them, but which one?

What if I should choose wrongly? What if I stayed in Minnesota and later found that I had missed the opportunity I had desired and that God had seemingly granted? What if I went to California and discovered that I was only returning to the safe and familiar and had ignored God's higher call? Since I was doing my part to find God's will, why wasn't He doing His part by making it plain?

The breakthrough came between the driving of two 16-penny nails. A friend was helping me build something, and I was explaining my dilemma to him. He didn't seem to understand my anxiety.

"You're in a great position," he said.

"How can you say that?" I asked. "I've been fasting for three days, my Bible is getting dog-eared in places its hardly ever been opened before, I've prayed more than any time since

they were handing out lottery numbers for the draft – and I'm still no closer to knowing what's the right decision."

"Listen, Dan," he replied. "You've been given a choice between two goods. You can't lose. You've got a good situation here, and you're being offered another good situation out there. I tell you, you're in great shape."

After holding out for a few more days, I realized he was right. I felt released. If this was a shell game, there were peas under all the shells. God does not economize on His blessings. His goodness multiplies itself. It spills over His creatures in a sweet excess. My choices

were evidence of God's munificence, not a trap to test my obedience.

God sent the counsel I needed between two blows of the hammer. I learned that sometimes He does not require us to make the single "right" choice. He is more concerned that we live faithfully as finite creatures before Him, our all-knowing and gracious Lord. In Him we are sometimes genuinely free – free to choose and enjoy any one of the many possible goods that are part of His creation.

I made my choice. No need to say which. It was the right choice, as would have been the other.

by David Taylor

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