

FATHER, MAY I?

There it is...Scripture answering every question we could ever ask. Remember playing the game "Mother, May I"? Yes, it was a child's game; but every sister, brother, mother, and even dad played this game with their little ones at one time or the other.

The game is played in this fashion: One person (it could be Mom) stands at a distance facing a line of kids. She then chooses a child (at random, or in order), and announces a direction. These follow a pattern, such as, "Brian, you may take' x' giant/regular/baby steps, hops, one-legged hops, etc. forward/backward." The child responds with "Mother may I?" Mom then states "Yes, you may" or "No, you may not", depending on her whim, and the child complies. If the child forgets to ask "Mother, may I?" he/she goes back to the starting line. First one to touch Mother wins.

In contrast to the "Mother, May I?" game, I think it would be a great idea if every Christian would ask God to intercede in our decision when we are to move somewhere, take a step forward in our responsibilities at work, or accept a job/position in another company. In other words, what is His plan for us as we live life in full view of His watchful and discerning eyes? Even more important, would it not be advantageous to get God's approval before choosing a wife or husband, purchasing a home, or what church to attend? Point in question: Do you literally say, "Father, May I" ...or, "Father, should I" before we start on our journey in life and before we make even minor decisions in our everyday game plan?

What the game rules did not tell you in the paragraph explaining the "Mother, May I" game is that if you are caught cheating (moving without instructions from the one person standing before you), you have to go back and start all over again. It is embarrassing to be caught cheating. It is not in the interest of the player to be looking for the easy way to get to the front of the line.

To address the relevance of this analogy, I want to suggest to the reader some ideas as to how I think the Lord feels concerning our asking for His guidance and counseling as we contemplate decisions in our lives:

- 1. There IS a difference in the way we should ask for Father God's approval in our decisions as we go through life.**

Let me explain. When we ask, we should never put the Father to test by asking for His help in obvious answers to situations we find ourselves in. As a father, you probably can tell when your children/teens are trying to get your approval by asking you to compromise your position on subjects of which they know how you stand. For instance, your daughter might ask, "Dad, can I go to the Jr. High Prom dance with Charlie?" They know before they ask that you have said, "No dates before the age 16 without a chaperon."

Our heavenly Father has made it very plain as to what our actions should be when we are contemplating asking for things that is either ungodly or not in our best interest. We know what the answers are before we ask when it is a matter of biblical ethics, personal desires, or acts in which we know to be out-of-bounds in maintaining God's standards.

The Christian should know that the answers to our questions...or our thoughts before a question is asked...is in the Word of God. For one who reads and heeds God's Word there is no reason to contemplate a decision that is questionable according to God's Word. In addition to reading God's Word, our first question in our minds should be: "Holy Spirit, will you lead me to know and do what is right concerning this matter?" The Holy Spirit is never wrong. Why challenge His answer!

2. There is no room for cheating in God's game plan for us.

Our lives have been planned for us to be good, do good, and come out on the good side in the end. The problem is in the choices we make in the game of life. There are minor choices and there are major choices. From all I read in God's Word, we will know when there is a relevant choice to be made in the game of life. Just as in the "Mother, May I" game, every move or direction planned for and directed by the one at the front (Mother) has to be confirmed and constituted by the player in the game. Cheating is one thing...for we know when we choose to do that. However, what about when we forget to say, "Father, May I?" Is that our fault? According to the Word of God it is! Now...you might say, "But, it is not our choosing to forget asking God for help. Why would he send us backward if we do something by mistake?" The answer: James 1:22-25 (ESV), "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a

hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

Habits of negligence should be resolved and overcome. Many think it a sufficient excuse for the worst of errors to plead forgetfulness. But do they not, as well as others, possess intellectual faculties to make decisions? If we have reached the age of accountability, then we should discipline our minds to be retentive. It is a sin to forget, and a sin to be negligent. If we form a habit of negligence, we may neglect our own soul's salvation and at last find that we are unready for the kingdom of God.

3. When we are challenged by the world's assault on our spirit, we should listen intently for God to answer us as we signal for His help.

The world is out to get us. Our biblical view of living a life in close contact with our merciful God does not go well with the followers of the gods of this world. Our immune system is triggered when there are ideologies contrary to what we know to be truth in God's Word. Lights start blinking and our spiritual Geiger counter signals us to stop before going forward, slow-down before proceeding, run faster to get away from the enemy's darts, etc. when what we are seeing, reading, or doing is not in line with God's plan for us. The word "listen" appears 412 times in the NIV translation of the Bible. I would think it is important to listen to God's answers before we start on our game plan of life. We will have lots of questions and God has the answer for every one of them. Our problem: We don't want to hear what He is saying or we don't like the answer He is giving. Many times we try to compromise God's Word and play the "possum" act with God. He knows when you are sincere and He knows when you are acting (trying to skirt the truth).

4. When we reach our goal (Mother in the "Mother, May I" game... and God in the game of life), we will know we have been successful in our journey to win the game.

Winning the game (Mother, May I?) means we were not caught cheating and we asked every time if it was alright to move in

response to "mother" telling us to jump, hop, or take one or two steps forward. Even if "mother" tells us to stay still and not move, i.e. "Gerald, you may remain in place and not move," we must ask her, "Mother, May I?"...or, if we don't...we go back to the starting point. It is imperative to ask "Mother" for permission to move in accordance with her directives. In contrast to this analogy or cute children's game, it is important for the Christian to listen and obey God's commands to successfully and joyfully enter into his arms as we finish our journey home. Oh, we may very well make it home due to the fact that we accepted the plan of salvation God has graciously and "grace" fully provided for us. However, making bad decisions throughout the Christian life will cause heartaches and headaches for us...and our family as they are having to put up with our bad choices and antics as we stretch toward the mark (finish line) of life.

I have learned that it is imperative to understand the "Game of Life" as a born-again Christian. Communicating with our God, the Holy One, and holding fast to His counseling will take us to the finish line on time and in step with the directions God has for us.

In summarizing this devotion, I think of the many times in my life I have longed for the privilege of asking one more time my earthly father's advice...just one more time, "Father, should I? Father, what would you do? Father, may I get a hug from you? Father, could I?" My father was genuine, was supportive, was protective, and was "the best" father a young boy could ever have. When I was thirteen, my father was killed in a construction accident. He was only 45 years old. It was sudden...and a devastating blow to my family. With two younger brothers, my mother became both father and mother to the three boys. As much as I loved my mother and her genuine love, she would know when not only she needed my dad's for advice, but so did we youngsters. However, as we grew older, we knew that it was time to turn over our questions to the One who knows us best...our Heavenly Father. We have learned through the years to quietly and sometimes silently ask, "Father, May I?" With a gentle nudge in our spirit man, we have depended on our Father's answer found in the Word of God. There it is...Scripture answering every question we could ever ask as we head for the finish line at the end of life's journey in which we will step in the arms of our Savior when He

says, "Welcome home!"

Philippians 3:12-14, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."