

Feelin' Lucky ?

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Jeremiah 29:11 (Contemporary English Version)

I will bless you with a future filled with hope--a future of success, not of suffering.

Today we're talking about "good luck and bad luck". Why some people seem to have all the good luck and others seem to have all the bad luck. Sometimes it's been said that if you're doing something right, good luck seems to happen. And if you're doing something wrong, well then you are destined to be plagued with bad luck. I'd like to begin by saying, I don't believe any of that. I believe God wants each one of us to have good luck all the time every day of our lives.

And that's exactly what the Bible scripture for today tells us. In **Jeremiah, chapter 29 verse 11** We're told that God "will bless you with a future filled with hope--a future of success, not of suffering" Now God doesn't just encode this into our genes and pat us on the bottom and wish us luck. It's something much more significant than that. I believe that God sticks with us all through life to help us achieve success and either guides or encourages or comforts us as we go and is there to redirect us through Jesus when we get off the path.

Since we're talking about luck, a few weeks ago my family and I went to visit my younger brother who lives in Las Vegas, the capital of luck, or not. We stayed at the Hard Rock and hung around the swimming pool. While I prepared for this message one of the things that really struck me aside from all the people that have tattoos now a days was that there so many of the people who work in the casino who were always telling us to have a "lucky day". But I don't really think that they meant it and I apparently didn't pay attention on just how to do it anyway.

So, in the spirit of Las Vegas and having a "lucky day", I wanted to do something today that would involve the dice that are on your tables and playing cards. There is a lot of symbolism here so you'll have to pay attention. What I would like everybody to do is take one of the die and roll it right now. This will represent something you've done with your life at this point in time. Now I will pick a card and the number here represents some achievement or success in life. Let's see if they match and if you're lucky.

Okay, now how many people match up with success at this point in time? Stand up. You must be lucky. Now, you can sit down and we'll do this again later on.

I really enjoy reading biographies and learning about people who have achieved a degree of success in their lives. There is a quote I'd like to share with you on success from a highly successful movie producer, Samuel Goldwyn. He started Paramount Pictures and was the G in MGM, which now owns one of the largest hotels in Vegas, for now. One time somebody came up to him admiring his

success and said, "you are so lucky." His response was "the harder I work the luckier I get." So maybe there is a little more to it than just luck.

Okay, it's time for our game again. Everybody, let's do this at the same time, you roll your die and we'll find out who the lucky people are again. How many people match this time. Please stand up. Okay, now is there anybody matching this time who matched last time, too. Remain standing. Okay, there are some lucky people here today. OK you can sit down. We're going to do this one more time later on but since we're in the Vegas mode there is another story I would like to share with you. I have told this before but it was so meaningful to me and just awesome to me and it bears repeating.

Right after we were married when Sandi and I first joined St. Luke's, we were asked to be senior high youth sponsors and since Sandi truly has a soft spot in her heart for youth, and I thought it might be a group that I could maybe impress, we said "yes". After several youth group gatherings, there was a week-end retreat scheduled. We stayed at this lodge building in the woods and things were going fantastic, we had great food, perfect weather and an outstanding group of young men and women. We had group activities in the morning and a huge lunch and then some free time in the afternoon.

For our free time some of the guys wanted to play cards and they wanted to play poker. I said, "Great" 'cuz I knew how to play Poker. As we were sitting around the table everybody was laughing and talking and just generally having a great time. Predictably the time came when we had to rejoin the others for church stuff and some group discussions. The guys started to whine and said they didn't want to do it because we were having such fun. I sure didn't want to be the heavy and be the responsible one (big shock) and tell them we had to stop. I came up with the idea that we would play one more hand, and there were about 7 or 8 of us sitting around the table, and I said, "If I win the hand, we go join the rest of the group and the minister, but if any one of you guys wins it, we can keep playing cards." They thought that was a great idea and said "yeah, yeah, yeah". I was thinking if I don't win, which in all likelihood was going to happen, how I was going to explain that to the minister but hey that's why they call it gambling.

Anyway, one of the other guys dealt out the cards and we were paying 5 Card Draw Poker and we went around the table with everybody saying how many cards they wanted to draw and I looked at my cards. I said, "I won't take any" and they all looked at me in astonishment thinking "no way is he going to win". Just at that time, the minister yelled in again saying it was time for us to join the group. The guys started laying down their hands and some of them were pretty good, then they looked at me. I laid down my five cards, 10, Jack, Queen, King, Ace all of the same suit, I had a royal flush, the highest hand you can get in poker. They all looked at me in astonishment and didn't say a word. They just got up and went. And that group time was one of the most meaningful times we had

during the whole weekend, both to them and me. I truly was moved. What do you think the odds are of that happening? I can tell you, when I was in Las Vegas I looked it up. The odds are 1 in 649,750. Now was I having good luck?

I think it was way more than that.

Okay, one more time for the game and let's find out who the lucky people are. Okay, all our winners stand up. Everyone who has been a winner twice remain standing. Anyone been a winner 3 times? Wow, next time I go to Vegas you're invited as my dice buddy.

Now what is the meaning and symbolism of rolling the dice and drawing the cards and seeing if you're lucky. I couldn't really think of a solid relationship, but I thought it would be fun. Wait a minute maybe it's more like life than I thought and luck doesn't really have a lot to do with having success. Because it's already guaranteed by God. If we follow God's plan it doesn't matter what number comes up on the dice, we will do well. Because God's Plan is for us all to succeed.

Now some you may know that my mom died when I was six. Not a good luck thing at all. And my dad was in charge of raising me and my two little brothers in Chicago. And as I've grown and gone through life I've often wondered Why? But all that time have always believed that God wants **a future filled with hope, a future of success** for me and it's up to me to expect just that and to work with that end in mind. And it's because of my mom and the loss of her that I have tried to be closer to my children every day and to leave in their hearts, every chance I get, my values and my belief in God's presence in our lives through Jesus.

One last story I would like to share with you. The story is about an extremely successful and wealthy businessman in New York. He had invited a new employee from the Midwest and his wife to fly to New York City to have a week-end on the town. He was going to have dinner with them at a fancy restaurant and picked them up in his limo. As they arrived at the restaurant it was raining lightly and as they were walking in, the executive stopped for just a minute, bent over on the sidewalk and picked something up. Dinner was fantastic and as they were having dessert the wife looked to the president of the company and said, "I've just got to ask you this, it's been bothering me all night long. When we were coming in you stopped on the sidewalk and picked something up. What was it you picked up?" He reached into his pocket and pulled the object out, and it was a penny. She stared at it. The look of astonishment on her face must have been obvious to him because he said, "let me tell you why."

He went on to tell her that before he was successful, things were not going well and he was near desperation. With his head down he had stopped along the sidewalk in this city and saw something shiny and picked it up. It was a penny. As he picked it up and looked at it, he read the words **"In God We Trust"**. From that point on, that's exactly how he lived his life and ran his business. And he went on to say that he has always stopped to pick up a penny whenever he has seen one. I too stop for pennies now and I personally could not be in more agreement when it comes to putting my trust in God when it comes to the future of my life, my family, and my business.

It is through God that **we will be bless with a future filled with hope-- a future of success, not of suffering.**

Closing:

As we leave here today ask yourself "Do I feel lucky?" (*weak Clint Eastwood impersonation*)

and know that God has already said Absolutely.

Be excited about all the possibilities as you view life from a new perspective.

Thank you for being here today at the Garden. Please come back and bring a friend, for luck.