

WE ALL WRITE FORTUNE COOKIES

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Ordering lunch at Dairy Queen the girl behind the counter noticed our son on crutches and asked what was wrong. Upon hearing that he'd broken his leg she responded, "He'll have problems with that leg the rest of his life."

I overheard a similar comment at Burger King when a man was telling the woman fixing his order how he'd been in a car wreck and sprained his back. "Your back will bother you the rest of your life," she told him, AND HE AGREED! It is incomprehensible to me that a person would accept that verdict, he can't predict the future, he doesn't know what God is going to do, and he was accepting and expecting long-term back problems! Our expectation of problems makes it easy for satan to take us where we've already decided we're going.

We typically think of a fortuneteller as someone paid to predict our future, but in reality we're all fortunetellers. Day in and day out we are predicting the future for ourselves and others. We do it without even realizing it.

"A cynic," says Sidney J. Harris, "is not merely one who reads bitter lessons from the past, he is one who is prematurely disappointed in the future." On a recent trip to visit my parents I called to tell them I was on my way, and my mother told me that a man was there to repair the holes in the basement wall where water was getting in, and that he was also going to repair the drywall. I was almost to their house when I realized that from the time I'd made the call I'd been imagining the scenario and expressing all my opinions, working myself up into a fit over the whole situation. I couldn't believe that I'd already spent all that time pre-living the future, what a useless waste of a beautiful day on a wonderful drive by myself.

Walking around the block recently I again found myself "fortunetelling" as I passed a guy using a Weedeater and my mind immediately imagined it tossing and embedding a rock into my leg. I thought how their business probably wouldn't pay for my injuries, and how if that happened I'd better take a picture of the guy and my leg before I left there. Continuing down that train of thought I figured that the business would be suspicious that I'd taken pictures when it happened, as if I'd

planned to sue from the beginning. Eventually I realized how silly my thoughts were.

Through our "fortunetelling" we are continually rating the future on our scale of possibility, desire, and expectation, and based on that scale our expectations are then stamped onto the future. For me, my mind is continually prodding around in my day, poking here and there to see what it contains and groping into each nook and cranny for anything it can find in the way of writing time. If I can't find any writing time ahead I go into my disappointed/frustrated mode.

Loretta LaRoche, in her book *Relax—You may only have a few minutes left*, refers to this tendency to predict the future with negativity as "premeditated suffering."

"Well, it'll probably rain."

"It'll be so crowded we won't find a parking space."

"Well, I doubt they'll be interested."

"It's probably closed."

"I expect they're sold out by now."

"Why bother?"

Reading her book has made me see how easily my mind goes into premeditated suffering. This morning I dropped my make-up cap down the sink drain, and suddenly heard myself go into "Oh no! I don't have time for this!" Then I began to wonder, when *would* I have time for this? Is there a *good* time to drop your make-up cap down the drain? When is that? It made me see how silly I was being. Terry put duct tape on a pencil and within minutes had it out.

We can defend our premeditated suffering by claiming that the odds are in favor of what we're expecting, but why are we wasting valuable time and energy living the negative before it even happens? I once went to a missionary reunion and much to my disappointment I got laryngitis and couldn't say a word the whole time. Now, every time I go I find a small fear within me that it might happen again, however slim the odds are.

We'd have so much free time and energy for creative, positive, joyful thoughts if we weren't so busy imagining the negative. We'd become positive people that others enjoyed being around. We'd be doing things we're supposed to be doing, like coming up with creative solutions to the world's problems. As we're told in Philippians 4:6-8, *Do not be anxious about anything ... And the peace of God, which transcends all*

understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.

My sister Jan and I were meeting to paint a section of my parent's basement that had gotten messed up because of recent flooding. I'd dreaded it for the last couple of weeks, fortunetelling my expectations onto it. The reality was that not only was it easy but Jan and I had fun working together and it took very little time.

Terry and I are working to get our own business of the ground, and it's been a rough trip. "Murphy's Law" is that "if anything can go wrong it will" but we actually seem to live under a different "law" that goes: "Everything will be as complicated as possible." Because of that "experience" it can be hard to not let that bring fear or cynical thoughts, especially during the night. All day I'm too busy with life to pay attention to my fears, but at night they come out of the woodwork. Loretta LaRoche refers to the panicking at night as "the doom-and-gloom crowd" in your head. She says, "They are always "awfulizing and catastrophizing."

Our son Chris put it a good way, when as a child he told us "the night exaggerates." For me that's the time when the worst premeditated suffering goes on, as fear magnifies problems into terrors. I've learned to nip it in the bud and not allow myself to go there.

Our fortunetelling extends to what we think about ourselves. "I'll never have money."

"If they really knew me ..."

"Yeah, like that'd ever happen to me."

"I'll never be able to play this instrument well."

"Why do I say such stupid things?"

The more we predict the future negatively in our heads the more we speak it to others. Take a day and listen to yourself. Some "fortunetellers" only predict the bad, dragging everyone around them down too. Someone I was talking to recently was telling me how hard it is to work with people who focus on the negative. "You feel like you're always swimming upriver," they said. "Instead of feeling good about the day your head is full of all that went wrong and what you didn't accomplish."

Imagine a life where you never allowed premeditated suffering to exist. That means no worry. As I've worked on this article I've begun to notice my thoughts more. Recently as we were visiting Terry's brother Terry was trying to get me hooked up to the internet. I heard myself think "Oh great, I probably don't even HAVE internet." (I did.) Later as I was thinking about writing this article I found myself repeating what I always think when I write an article, which is, "I'll probably offend everyone."

There are enough problems in our lives without adding imagined or perceived ones, and others sure don't need negative things spoken into their lives. If, instead, we could fill our minds with positive, joyful thoughts of gratitude, creativity, and hope, we'd be able to REALLY live our lives the way we were created to live them. And it's all in making the choice to do so.

As you notice your thoughts moving into premeditated suffering stop and regroup, forcing yourself to change to something positive. Satan wants to tear you down, to put anything on you that you're willing to take. Don't take it. And this goes for your own fortunetelling that you do in your own life. We spend so much time speaking the negative into our lives and after a while we believe it. Change what you speak. Start speaking positive things over yourself. Premeditated suffering is different than planning ahead, or looking at possibilities, but you can't allow your negative thoughts to project into those things. God says our words have power, and what we speak into ourselves and into others carries power, both to tear down or to build up. Put another way, our words either bring life or they bring death.

At the beginning of this article I told about the girl at Dairy Queen telling us that Chris would have problems with his leg the rest of his life. Terry's immediate response to her was "No he won't." And as we walked away he said quietly, "I rebuke that word in the name of Jesus."

What you speak as your "fortune" generally comes to pass, as your mind and emotions become what you think about yourself and your world. Changing your fortunetelling to the positive actually builds a different future for you, one that is built of what you CAN do and the good that God has for you.

If we truly believe that God is on control of our lives and that He loves us, what right do we have to play God and predict the future? Our place is to walk in a constant state of listening to Him and respond to what He tells us. And He rarely

gives us the script ahead of time, so what right do we have to tell Him how it's going to end? Because prayer is conversation with God, and if our voices are constantly speaking the bad that is going to happen then not only are you're praying for the bad but you're speaking it into existence in your life. We're told: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* (Eph 4:29) We're all fortunetellers, but does anyone WANT to hear you tell their fortune?

God IS our future, and He's walking through it with us as He guides and brings good out of "real life." It's wise to have a plan and to walk towards goals, but we should be able to live joyfully today without worrying about the future, trusting that He is walking it ahead of us and guiding us each moment. That relationship allows us to happily live each moment to its fullest, letting Him take care of tomorrow.