

It's Not Cheating. It's a Shortcut!

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March 22, 2009

2 Samuel 5:1-5

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On my 30th birthday my family gave me a Collectors Edition of the game Monopoly. You remember Monopoly, don't you? It's that game where you hold all that play money in your hand going "I wish it was real. I wish it was real"! Now, I love playing Monopoly, but getting someone to commit several hours of their time just to lose was always a difficult task. Yes I said lose. Every time we'd play, I would win, really! And no, I didn't think it unfair that I began the game already owning several properties. I mean, hey, it is MY game.

In Monopoly, Park Place and Boardwalk seem to be the most prized properties. For example, land on Boardwalk when it has a hotel and it will cost you \$2000.00. Because of this, a lot of players set their sights on owning both of these. But in reality, it takes a minimum of 5 rolls just to get there. If you happen to roll 2 Twelve's, 1 Eleven, and 2 Two's, you could possibly own these coveted properties, but the problem is, you must travel past a lot of others just to get there. In this scenario, you would land on the "Electric Company", "Illinois Avenue", and "Short Line Railroad" before you even hit Park Place. And what if these other properties are owned by someone else? I know, I know. There is always the possibility of drawing that Chance card that says "Advance to Boardwalk", but you've got to go the whole way around the board again just to land on Park Place. So don't start hoping for a chance Card to bail you out.

I've found that the best way to win at Monopoly is, well, certainly not in taking shortcuts. Shortcuts almost always cost you more in the end. And being the banker doesn't help either (cause people eventually start thinking like the IRS: they wonder where you got so much money). The best way to win is to keep your eyes on the goal, and to also be prepared for what reaching that goal may cost you; it will not be quick and painless. There will always be times when landing on another property may cost you dearly.

With the death of Ishbosheth (and I'm so glad my parents didn't turn to 2 Samuel 4 to find a name for their son), we find everything in place for David to be King of Israel. *Then all the tribes of Israel went to David at Hebron and told him, "We are your own flesh and blood. ² In the past, when Saul was our king, you were the one who really led the forces of Israel. And the Lord told you, 'You will be the shepherd of my people Israel. You will be Israel's leader.'"* ³So there at Hebron, King David made a covenant before the Lord with all the elders of Israel. And they anointed him king of Israel. ⁴ David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in all. ⁵ He had reigned over Judah from Hebron for seven years and six months, and from Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.¹ (2 Samuel 5:1-5).

Okay, now we can finally take a deep breath. After about 15 years, David is King over the entire nation of Israel. But getting there was not without hardships along the way. I do not see any evidence of God shortcutting David's ascension to the throne. Three times throughout this journey, God reminded David of His promise, but did not whisk him there immediately. No, God allowed David to experience some rough times, some hard times, and some depressing times on the way to the goal; to becoming king.

Even our Savior did not short cut His way to glory (although Satan did offer Jesus a Chance Card three times). ⁸ *Next the devil took Him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ "I will give it all to You," he said, "if You will kneel down and worship me."* ¹⁰ *"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only Him.'"* ² (Matthew 4:8-10) And if God did not shortcut Jesus, and if Jesus did not depend upon a Chance Card to reach the goal, then neither should we expect God to make our journey to the goal quick and painless.

The Apostle Peter reminds us to, *"make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control*

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness,⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.⁸ The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.¹⁰ So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away.¹¹ Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.³

(2 Peter 1:5-11)

Peter says that at the end we enter Heaven alongside Jesus Christ. And God provides no short cut to get there. We begin with faith in the promises of Jesus, but then Peter adds a long list of things that should supplement our faith. And at first glance, none of these makes sense. Since salvation come by faith, why must I have moral excellence? Why do I have to learn to love others? Why must we grow in these areas? Because entering Heaven is not our goal. Heaven is our destination. Heaven is our reward for living a life of faith, but our goal, God's goal for us, is something altogether different.

To be a Christian is to allow God to shape us and mold us into a tool that He can use for His glory and honor. I believe that's why David endured what he did before being established as king. And I believe that's why God is allowing you to go through some dark times and some low times in your own life. It is through these tough times that you become better equipped to reach His goal for your life; to be a productive and useful tool in the hands of our Master.

So the next time someone starts telling you that with enough faith (or the right amount of giving) God will pour out His blessing upon you, you can tell them to keep the Chance Card and remind them that you're not interested in taking the short cut. Tell them you're not interested in God's blessing (that'll raise a few eyebrows). Instead, tell them that your goal is to be a blessing to others! And that you are prepared for what reaching that goal may cost you.

³Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.