

Just the other day, I was talking with one of my closest friends about one of his business enterprises. Here's what I said: "Believe the best, expect the worst."

"Wait," he said, "I've never heard you say that before."

I laughed and said "You're kidding, I say that to my university students and my clients all the time! And I've been applying it as a leader for years!"

So, just what is that all about...*believe the best, expect the worst*? Yeah, I've said that for years, but where did I pick up that little nugget? Or did I just dream it up? So, I geared up the search engine to see, and the best, most interesting answer—in my eyes at least—was that the famous film director and comedy genius Mel Brooks said this: "Hope for the best. Expect the worst. Life is a play. We're unrehearsed." Amusing. What did you expect from a funnyman in the movie business? But the whole idea deserves a deeper look.

Actually, "believe the best, expect the worst" is a very practical phrase that works to effectively capture an amazing blend of human nature and God's nature. And, because that's true, it's very helpful in times of planning, in times of strife, in times of mystery, and in times of victory.

Let's start at the beginning—in the first few chapters of Genesis. God made Adam and Eve without sin. That is, God made them both perfectly, without flaws. Unless, of course, you consider God giving them free will to decide for themselves, to make either good or bad decisions, is a design flaw by God! Because that's exactly what God did! He didn't make humans as robots that would follow His every command.

When I teach this reality, I ask: what would *you* do if *you* had the opportunity to start creating from scratch? Would you create robots who are obedient to your every command? Or would you create beings who could legitimately choose to love others and to love you. Or *reject* you. Yes, make people like God did! Here's the deal. It's pretty clear that robotic love is not any kind of worthy love, let alone the *agape* love that is God's standard. Agape love is pure. Agape love is sacrificial. And, yes, agape love is *willful*! Like Joshua of old, we *will* ourselves to serve and love the Lord! We *will* our response of returning God's love!

So, back to the Eden story. God did not create a second-best version of humanity, a robotic version that must follow every dimension of some sort of divine hard-wiring. Instead, God created humanity with the capacity for success...and the capacity for failure...with both capacities allowed by God. You know, that's a key part of what's "good" in God's eyes...the capacity to fail! And the capacity to respond to God's agape love with our love, however feeble. You see, God believes the best about humanity, and the best is when love is the core delivery or fitting response by humanity.

So there we go, *believe the best*. But, as we have seen, God simultaneously *expects the worst* from humanity. God foreknew that Adam and Eve—and all the rest of us—would sin. After all, He created us with that free will, that capacity. And, sadly, we fulfill His free-will expectations. But here's the good news. The Word of God tells us that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. That's in Revelation 13:8. And that's stunning. In response to humanity's failure, God made extraordinary provision...amazing redemption...full-blown eternal fellowship with Him—all planned and agreed to *before* Eden.

And God's grand strategy for all humanity is His unshakeable Kingdom for believers for all eternity. That's found in Hebrews 12:28. And the populating of that unshakeable Kingdom was *and is* enabled by the plan of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the Lamb to be slain.

Yes, you heard that right! God ordained that His desired eternal reality would be fulfilled when He expected the worst of humanity and made provision for that reality—for whosoever would choose a new path, a humble response to the New Covenant effected by the Cross. Wow. Whosoever does that will enjoy eternal life! And, remember, that eternal Kingdom is unshakeable! Apparently, with God's final seal

of redemption at the Judgment Seat of Christ, fallen creatures who are redeemed through Christ's work on the Cross are stronger than the untested perfectness of Adam and Eve in Eden before the Fall!

Amazingly, God had experience in this area outside of His dealings with humanity. The Bible points to God creating Lucifer with free will and Lucifer pridefully rebelling and becoming Satan. Of course, Lucifer's rebellion was not a surprise to God...and God has promised a very different eternal provision for Satan.

But, enough of that! What about us—little ol' us—who God thought so much of that He gave His Son for our benefit? We should and do glory in this amazing eternal provision made on our behalf. But we're compelled to drill down further. You see, God *is* good. And He promises in Romans 8:28 that “all things work together for good for those who are called according to God's purposes.” Wow, what's that? *All things work together for good!* Sure enough, that's for us, *believing and making provision for the best* about everything that happens to a believer, because God has promised just that. How amazing!

But there is a bit of a conditional catch there. Are *we* called according to his purposes, as the end of the verse says? Of course! Every believer is called to fulfill God's purposes, going forth and making disciples. You know—God's purposes for His children...loving God, proclaiming His Kingdom, loving our neighbors! Yes, the *best* in God's economy is to opportunistically do His will here on earth such that we are richly rewarded for our post-salvation works! That's in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15, where it says a believer's works not built on the foundation of Christ will burn up, but our works built on Christ's foundation will be rewarded! Yeah, God is merciful, for sure...He will not ask us to lug around our bad works for eternity!

Now to dive more deeply into the second part of that phrase: *God expects the worst*. To be sure, God knows that certain of His creation will reject following Him. He foreknows and expects the worst—that certain number of His own created beings will reject His Son's sacrifice on the Cross.

But here's the really sobering truth for us. God also knows that even those who would call upon the name of Jesus would often—even daily—choose to put their personal priorities over God's purposes. That's right, many Christians have selfish priorities that they pursue every day, crowding out God's best, His desired purposes for them. Are you shocked? You shouldn't be. God has watched just that for, oh, about two thousand years! And He's not surprised that, while several billion people worldwide have not yet heard the Gospel, countless Christians cram their calendars full of fruitless pursuits and silliness, week in and week out. In short, God expects the worst. But He still lovingly creates every person in the womb and embraces every believer who responds to the Cross. Yes, *He's believing the best while expecting the worst*. And, in due course, in His perfect steadfastness and timing, He still makes the best of all that messiness!

How about our everyday life in a multitude of relationships, then? Every Christian leader in every business and every nonprofit can fruitfully operate upon this foundational mindset of *believing the best, expecting the worst*. Because first and foremost, that mindset captures the positive, uplifting reality that God is willing and working mightily in our midst, from the startlingly eternal to the seemingly mundane dailyness of life. And expecting the worst is actually a vital part of that—that's the reality of everyday, ordinary failure in workplaces and families that we should continually prepare to redeem and repair to excellence.

Here's where the rubber meets the road. Rather than being devastated when people and processes let us down, we readily respond to the failures around us, grateful for the opportunity to respond with God's wisdom. We are actually privileged to enjoy our roles as part of God's redemptive best. And here's the final bonus. When quality people around us perform with great competence, with consistent reliability, and with great results, well, then, they blow away our worst expectations. Following Jesus's example, we can and should enjoy rewarding them greatly. So. Here are the amazing outcomes of the practice of believing the best and expecting the worst: anchored cheerful positivity, grounded realism, principled redemption, earned rewards, and exceptional organizational results. You know—*like the Kingdom of God!*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. As we think on Romans 8:28, have you come to depend on the expectation of God’s working all things together for good in every part of your life? And what about that second part—are you focused on the purposes He has called you to? Explain Romans 8:28 as to its real-world reality and emotional anchor (or not) for your life.
  
2. Do you consider being redemptive in your relationships a privilege or a burden? Elaborate.
  
3. People are inevitably going to fail or disappoint you. Do you have readied responses for redeeming others in your family or your workplace? Explain. (For further resources on “readied responses,” see the teaching in the *Lasting Greatness* seminar at [whitestone.org/seminars](http://whitestone.org/seminars).)