



Is the Devil in the Details of My Life?

1 Corinthians 13:11: (NASB) *When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*

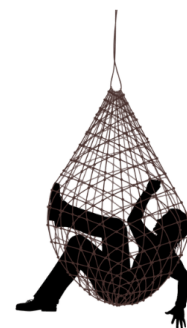


The source of the phrase, “the devil is in the details” is a bit unsure. It is thought to be a derivation of the phrase, “God is in the details,” from an old German proverb sometime in the 1800’s. Whatever the origin, both phrases are profoundly true. As we begin a new year, we often look to get things in order, so that we can improve our quality of life. For a Christian, this is a great practice but is also one that should be approached with a measure of caution. Why? Because the devil CAN be in the details! Just because we decide we want our lives to be better does not mean we will automatically go about it in a God-honoring way. So, what do we watch out for? How can we be sure to have the details of our desires be more appropriate, have godliness written all over them and no trace of the devil?

Why would the devil be in the details? Because he is the father of all arrogance and deception. The book of Isaiah prophetically describes Lucifer’s (Satan’s) fall from grace.

These verses depict several aspects of how Satan’s mindset sets a pattern for humanity to fall into the “devil in the details” trap:

Isaiah 14:12-14: (NASB) ¹²*How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations!* ¹³*But you said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north.* ¹⁴*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.*



The King James Version and New King James Version translations use the name “Lucifer” instead of *star of the morning* here. Interestingly, this is the only place the name Lucifer is used.



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WHO IS SATAN?

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Now, this is all about ambition, which can be a good thing. It is a necessary characteristic in the life of a Christian as long as it is based in humble service to God, His Word and our Lord Jesus. We want to have this idea as a theme throughout this podcast.

Ambition IS a good thing in its appropriate place.





First, let's look at Satan's proposed destination:

Isaiah 14:13: (NASB) *But you said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God...*

Satan wanted something above the position he was assigned:

Job 38:4,7: (NASB) *⁴Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, ⁷When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

Satan was one of the morning stars. In Isaiah 14:13 he said, *I will raise my throne above the stars of God* - above the wonderful position he had been given. He wanted more!

Ambition is suspect when it takes steps outside of God's guidelines. It is great to have ambition, but it has to be influenced by guidelines that are righteous. Satan's ambition was certainly *outside* of those guidelines.



Saul of Tarsus Stephen

There are many examples in Scripture of such overreaching. One example is Saul of Tarsus:

Acts 8:1-3: (NASB) *¹Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ²Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. ³But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.*

This is a warped sense of justice as we have seen in the past with false Christianity.



NEGATIVE SUMMATION: Saul of Tarsus had the permission of the High Priest to pursue Christians. His **DESTINATION** was to be the chief exterminator of Christianity, and in so doing he forfeited all claims to godliness. Saul's details used lying, deception and unlawful acts to drive him towards his **DESTINATION**.

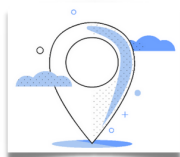
Saul was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. In the Greek this means "to approve, to be pleased with." He took pleasure in attacking Christians. He was terrorizing people and dragging them from their homes by the permission and blessing of the High Priest. Saul was fearless and happily did what he was told to do. His ambition was exceptional but not in a good way - what he was doing was evil, dark and wrong.



In contrast to Saul, Stephen, the man who Saul had consented to have stoned was another example of someone with ambition, but his ambition was in a godly direction.

Driven by God's spirit, Stephen was only about doing the work of God through Jesus:

Acts 6:8-13: (NASB) ⁸And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen... rose up and argued with Stephen. ¹⁰But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. ¹¹Then they secretly induced men to say, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. ¹²And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. ¹³They put forward false witnesses who said, This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law.



POSITIVE SUMMATION: Stephen was sure of his **DESTINATION**. He had answered the call to follow Jesus and his life was entirely bent towards fulfilling his discipleship. Stephen's *details* were simply sacrifice and spirit-driven. God was in the details of Stephen's destination, not Satan!

New Year's resolutions always have a destination involved. When thinking about the details of our destination, let's make sure our ambition is like Stephen's - driven by godliness, God's spirit and clearly focused on the right things.

Like Saul, Stephen was fearless and happily did what he was told to do. Both men were highly ambitious. The difference was the voices they were listening to - and we just had a wonderful lesson about this on our previous episode. Saul was listening to Satan through the religious powers of the day. Powers of darkness appeared to be powers of light but were, in fact, godless.



Episode 1210 Whose Voices Are You Listening To?

Identifying what we hear, its affects and how to rise above the fray

Stephen was listening to God through His spirit and His son, Jesus. It did not matter that Stephen's strong ambition would get him killed. He was standing for something higher.

Of course, eventually we know that Saul became known as Paul. After his conversion to following Jesus, he poured every ounce of his ambition into **CORRECTLY** serving God. But he had great remorse over what he had done and called himself unworthy and *the least of the apostles* in 1 Corinthians 15:9.

We hold Paul in high regard - because he did not run away from his past, but instead he embraced it as what helped make him what he was. He acknowledged it, learned from it, grew through it and past it.



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**WHAT HAPPENED
ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS?**

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Stephen's details were to simply sacrifice and be spirit-driven:

Acts 7:59-60: (NASB) ⁵⁹*They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!* ⁶⁰*Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them! Having said this, he fell asleep.*

Remember, ambition can be a good thing in the right place with the right motivation. Stephen's ambition was to please God. He gave his life for that ambition. His reward is an eternal reward. What is our destination? What is our ambition? Are we focusing on the right direction, or is the devil in the details of where we want to go?

Jesus was Stephen's example. Jesus, too, had a destination right from the start.

In Isaiah, we get a prophetic view of the willingness of Jesus to accomplish God's will as Isaiah is being prepared to go and preach to the sinful nation of Israel:

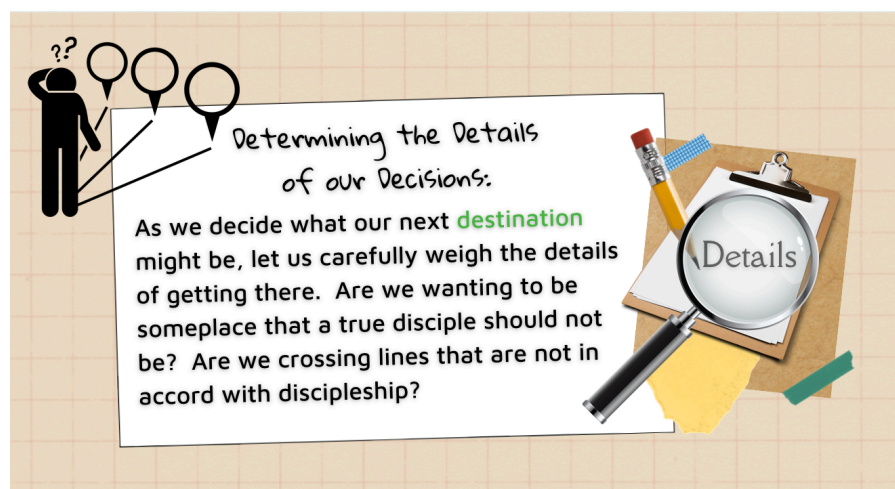
Isaiah 6:8: (NASB) *Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then I said, Here am I. Send me!*

In other words, Jesus, like Isaiah, said: *I'll do it, Father.*

Jesus was willing and able to do whatever God's will required. The details of his ambition are reflected in another prophetic view of his pre-human existence:

Proverbs 8:30-31: (NASB) ³⁰*Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him,* ³¹*rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men.*

This is such an inspirational look at Jesus in his pre-human existence working with the Father. It shows their creativity and unity working together. In contrast, we think about Satan, this mighty spiritual being who harbored an unhealthy ambition in his heart to rise to a destination that was not his to have. This can happen to us as well. We need to be careful to not let the devil be in our details.



These are important questions.



Do our ambitions, desired destinations and resolutions cross lines that are a bit fuzzy? Are we side-stepping over a guideline or ignoring it totally?

Our emotions can play such a powerful role in how we see our destinations. Let's stay alert and keep them in check.

The devil can easily be in the details of a position we might like to hold. What should we look for?

When looking at where we are going, we can easily get excited and perhaps not think things all the way through. However, when we are considering what kind of position we are focusing on holding, this should provoke us to a deeper and more detailed approach. It is one thing to get there and another thing to stay there.



We are talking about having ambition. Is being ambitious bad?

It depends on what the ambition is towards. Spiritually or righteously-driven ambition is the only acceptable kind. This means what the Scriptures say is right, not what we think is right. If it is not a scripturally-driven principle, the devil will be in the details!



First, Satan's proposed position - where did he desire to be?

Isaiah 14:13: (NASB) *But you said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north.*

Mountains in Scripture represent governments. For Satan to have decided he would sit on the *mount of assembly* meant him taking the seat of authority with regard to where the people of earth would go for spiritual worship.

Satan coveted a POSITION OF AUTHORITY, and much later he tried to apply his position to Jesus himself as he tempted Jesus in the wilderness:

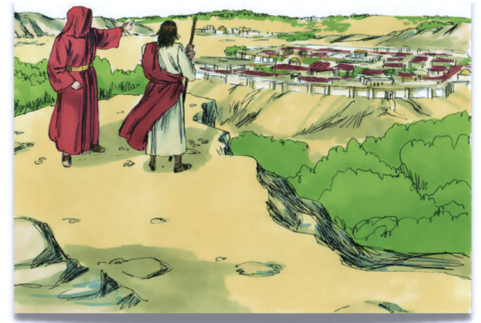
Matthew 4:8-9: (NASB) *⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹and he said to him, all these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.*

Think about it - this is a new context for Satan. *The word* (Jesus in his pre-human existence) *was made flesh*. A spirit being was changed to a perfect human being. In Satan's mind, maybe, just maybe, he could deceive Jesus like he did Eve.



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THE THREE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS
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When we look at these temptations, we see the devil saying: *I know you came to take the world from me; I will give it to you if you just bow down to me.* The devil IS the details here; he is saying: *This is my world. I am king of this world - there is nothing you can do to take it from me, but I will give it to you if you worship me.* The position Satan desired was to be the one sitting on the mountain in the seat of authority where humanity came to worship, acknowledging him as their ruler. Jesus came to take that from him. In our lives, in the positions we desire and in our resolutions, we must ask if the devil is in the details of where we are going and what we are trying to do. There are many examples in Scripture of those seeking exalted positions like Satan.



One example is Simon the magician who ironically came to Christianity as a result of Saul of Tarsus scattering Christians:

Acts 8:9-13: (NASB) ⁹Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; ¹⁰and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, This man is what is called the Great Power of God. ¹¹And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

Everyone was flocking after him because he had the ability to amaze and entrance, to have people follow him in awe.

¹²But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. ¹³Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Simon was enthralling the people, but once he met Philip, heard his preaching and observed his great miracles, he became a believer. Simon was amazed because this was real! It was not an illusion.



NEGATIVE SUMMATION: Simon's **POSITION** had previously been one of awe and wonder among the people who thought his power was from God, but - the devil was in the details - any powers of sorcery he had were from Satan. He came to Christ and saw something bigger than himself. The details of his previous **POSITION** in life were to use illusion and sensationalism to draw people after him.

Simon then saw the holy spirit (God's power and influence) being given through the laying on of hands by Peter and John - well, that's a neat trick! - and Simon offered them money to sell him the power to do this. He tried to buy spiritual authority in order to make himself important again in the eyes of his audience. Old habits die hard! He was not selfless; he was seeking position for the wrong reasons.



Here is something interesting - to this day, the sin of buying or selling a church position or privilege like pardons is called "Simony" after Simon the magician who tried to buy the power to bestow miracles.



When we look at our everyday lives, what kind of position do we want to be in this coming year? Our ambition to improve our lives in whatever way we seek has to be examined. What is driving us to the destination we want to get to and the position we want to hold? Is it in contrast to, or in agreement with the will of God? Let's look at another example.



In contrast to what was about to happen with Simon, we look at the Apostle Peter. He also had old habits. Before Pentecost, Peter's position was as a leader of the apostles, and he made many mistakes. Despite the mistakes, Jesus saw his undeveloped potential and kept Peter in that important position. Peter arrived in town and laid his hands on some to give them the holy spirit. It is Peter who will address Simon.

We have two men with strong, impetuous characters coming head-to-head here. Let's observe Peter's sanctified, spiritual reaction:

Acts 8:18-22: (NASB) ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the holy spirit. ²⁰But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

Simon had fame and wanted to keep it. Keep this in mind when we think about our positions.

Let's look at a quote from a sermon Martin Luther King, Jr. gave on August 11, 1957, called, *Conquering Self-Centeredness*. In it, he effectively describes the negative effects of being self-centered and acknowledges his own struggle. He states, "One of the problems that I have to face and even fight every day is this problem of self-centeredness, this tendency that can so easily come to my life now that I'm something special, that I'm something important."

He goes on to say how there is no city he can go where he is not "lavished with hospitality by peoples of all races and of all creeds." Hundreds and thousands of people had to be turned away from his speaking engagements because there was no room. Then the crowd rushes in for autographs. It is all very enticing to the ego.

"Living under this is not easy; it's a dangerous tendency that I will come to feel that I am something special, that I stand somewhere in this universe because of MY ingenuity and that I am important, that I can walk around life with a type of arrogance because of an importance that I have. And one of the prayers that I pray to God every day is: 'O God, help me to see myself in my true perspective. ...O God, help me to see that where I stand today, I stand because others helped me to stand there and because the forces of history projected me there. And this moment would have come in history even if M.L. King had never been born...'"



It was not about the glory of the position; it was about glorifying God. All he accomplished would have happened whether M.L. King, Jr. was there or not. This is the way God's plan works. It does not need you or I; it just needs individuals. We need to see ourselves with humility to be able to handle such things.

Going back to Peter and Simon: Peter puts Simon in his place by telling him his heart was not in the correct place.



POSITIVE SUMMATION: Peter was sure of his **POSITION** because he was listening to the leading of God's spirit while focusing on the principles of discipleship. Simon, in contrast, saw a way to regain his **POSITION** where the people gave him adulation by going back to his old ways. *Peter had learned to direct his ambition within the specific guidelines of discipleship.*

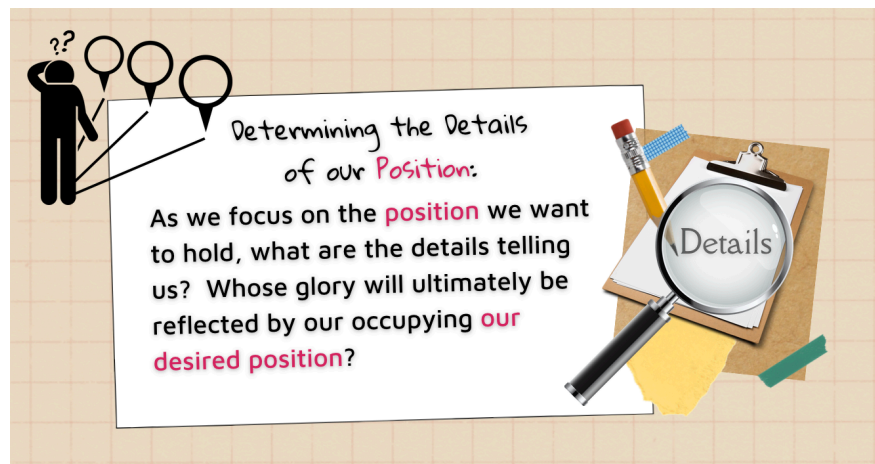
That is where we need to look for positions in life when resolving to make our lives better. It is good to resolve to make our lives better, but we need to be sure that the devil is not in the details of the position we are seeking.

Jesus was Peter's example. Jesus had a position of power and influence as a man and continually chose to use that position to *exactly reflect* his Father's will. That means not one syllable of deviation. It is inspiring to see how precisely Jesus fulfilled his Father's will. ALL the details of the position of Jesus pointed to the Father! Remember, all the details of *Satan's* position pointed to himself.

Here are the details of Jesus' position:

John 8:28-29: (NASB) ²⁸ So Jesus said, When you lift up the son of man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught me. ²⁹ And He who sent me is with me; He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.

There is such a power in his humility and in his clarity. *I speak these things as the Father taught me... I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.* With this way of thinking, we will never go wrong! By following the high scriptural principles of righteousness, we will always head in the right direction. We cannot do this perfectly like Jesus did, but we can make sure that in whatever position we seek in applying our ambition this coming year, the devil is not in the details.





We must be honest when we look at our *secret motivations* for why we are doing something. Will God get the glory? God sees our real motivations, our secret motivations, and we need to be honest with ourselves on what is truly motivating us in that position.

Wanting to be recognized as special is natural for most of us. Understanding the potential dangers is crucial!

**It is impossible for life to be without difficult conditions.
What are the details in handling these challenges?**

Settling into a position implies some level of comfort, and that is important. One thing Christians need to establish about comfort in our discipleship is an acceptance of “clouds” and difficulties as a beneficial condition when following Jesus. Unconditional dedication requires unconditional acceptance of these difficulties as part of our growth process.



What do we mean by this?



Let's look at the condition of Satan's proposed ascendancy:

Isaiah 14:14: (NASB) *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds...*

Clouds in Scripture often represent trouble. Satan describes his desire to rise to such a point that all disturbances would be beneath him. There is a deep sense of entitlement that comes with the ambition to rise and live above the issues of life.

It is easy to assume certain conditions of comfort as we pursue our destination and our position. This is one of the subtle ways that we fall into having the devil infiltrate our details.

The Rich Young Ruler

One scriptural example is this of the rich young ruler:

Mark 10:17-22: (NASB) *¹⁷As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to him and knelt before him, and asked him, Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*

His desired destination was clear, but he knew nothing of what the position required:

¹⁸And Jesus said to him...¹⁹You know the commandments, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother. ²⁰And he said to him, Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.

He was sincere and focused. He understands the Law and claims to have kept the Law. This young man has lived a righteous life.



Jesus will now let him know the conditions he will need to accept to attain the desired position:

²¹Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, *One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*

²²But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

This wealthy and sincere man was only willing to search as far as the comfort of his present conditions would allow. Jesus recognized his heart but also his attachment to worldly wealth. We end up with a negative conclusion because he was not ready to be a disciple. He was not ready for self-denial and selflessness. His ambition was divided - he wanted to be a follower but wanted his wealth more. The devil in the details here is divided ambition.

This sounds harsh because he was a good man. However, he was not yet discipleship material. Just because someone lives a good life does not mean they are in line to follow Jesus.

When we desire a position, we sometimes want to bring our own conditions along. The devil is in the details because Satan decided to rise *above the clouds*, making the conditions such that he would be beyond any trouble or interference with his ambition.



Do we put conditions on our service to God? *I want to be a devoted Christian follower, but I want to go to church on Sunday for only an hour and that is all.* This checks off a box but does not change our life. We want to change our lives.

Philip The Ethiopian Eunuch Jesus



As a contrast to the rich young ruler's story where present conditions of comfort limited a spiritual future, let's go back to Acts 8 and examine Phillip the disciple, the Ethiopian eunuch and Jesus himself. These three examples show us the power of accepting the conditions that God in His providence puts before us.

Phillip is told by an angel to go to a road that leads to Gaza, and there he sees the Ethiopian eunuch.

Phillip shows his ambition is to do the Lord's bidding, no matter the conditions that may lay ahead:

Acts 8:27-39: (NASB) ²⁷...and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.



Observations about this Ethiopian eunuch:

- He was a proselyte. He had converted to Judaism, which tells us he had faith.
- His important position in the court - to be in charge of all of the queen's treasure - tells us he had integrity and was trusted.

- We can deduce that he was a successful man with some wealth himself. He had the freedom to go to Jerusalem to worship, so he was not a slave. Buying a scroll of Isaiah would have cost money, so it showed he really wanted to learn.

²⁹Then the spirit said to Philip, Go up and join this chariot. ³⁰Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, Do you understand what you are reading? ³¹And he said, Well, how could I, unless someone guides me? And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Philip was provoked by God's spirit to go to this road without being told why. He was not worried about the conditions. Meanwhile, the eunuch was traveling on the road, wanting to worship God in a fuller way but not knowing how. Philip joined him and asked if he knows what he is reading. Philip soon realized he was sent here because the man needed a teacher. Both men were willing for the conditions of their lives to guide them to godliness.

Faithfulness and humility are apparent as Phillip joins the eunuch. The example of Jesus would now become central:

³²Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he does not open his mouth. ³³In humiliation his judgment was taken away; who will relate his generation? For his life is removed from the earth.

³⁴The eunuch answered Philip and said, Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this?...

³⁵Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

amazing

What are the odds that the one scripture he was reading just happens to be about Jesus? Here is Jesus right in front of them, so to speak. The rich young ruler had Jesus literally standing right in front of him. There are no odds; there is God's providence!

In the practicality of our everyday life, we all have goals. We need to ask for God's grace in such things. Are we trying to set the conditions for what happens, or are we allowing God's providence to drive us, whatever the conditions may be? Usually, the best growth lessons come from the hardest experiences. We all want a good year of Christian growth, but are we saying we want the conditions for that growth to be nice, soft and comfortable? We need the hard experiences. Are we trying to dictate the conditions to get to a position? If we do that, the devil is in the details.



The best growth lessons come from the hardest experiences.

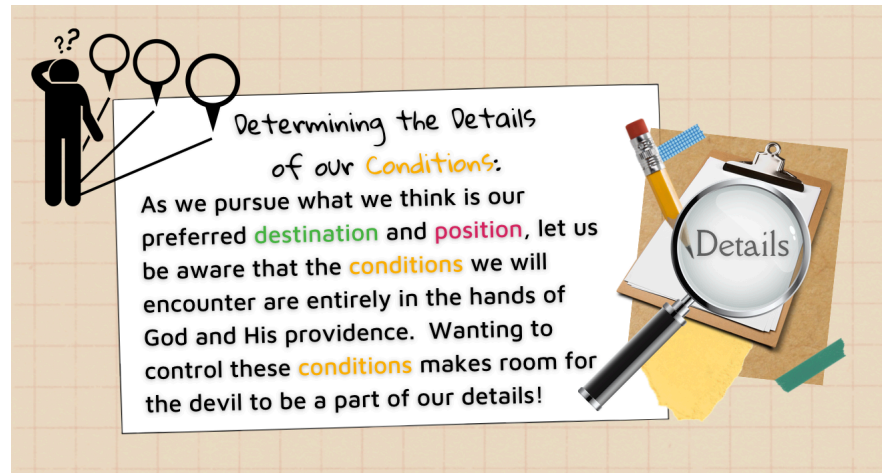
Phillip undoubtedly laid out God's plan and the sacrifice of Jesus. In contrast to Satan, who was looking to rise above all conditions of discomfort, Jesus was shown to openly accept such conditions of suffering because he would do whatever the Father required. This led to the eunuch's commitment to Christ because he saw the depth of obedience, even under stress, pain and suffering.

He just needed to learn what the Scriptures meant:

³⁶As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized? ³⁷And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God. ³⁸And he ordered

the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

Conditions unfolded for the eunuch. He wanted understanding, and God answered his prayers. Conditions were met and the eunuch responds to what is before him. It was not what he expected, and yet, his life was changed for the better. The eunuch became a disciple, and Phillip was taken away to further witness the gospel elsewhere. They both allowed God's providence to bring them together so this man could come to Christ. God was in the details of their conditions.



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Another quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon called, *Conquering Self-Centeredness*. He describes self-centered people, saying, “To live a life of perpetual egotism...They start out, the minute you talk with them, talking about what they can do, what they have done. They're the people who will tell you, before you talk with them five minutes, where they have been and who they know. They're the people who can tell you in a few seconds, how many degrees they have and where they went to school and how much money they have. We meet these people every day...It's a problem that meets us in everyday life. We meet it in ourselves, we meet it in other selves: the problem of self-centeredness.”

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“Lord, whatever Your will is” must be the sense for every Christian - regardless of what condition we find ourselves in. If we have anything less than complete dedication to moving in that direction, the devil is somehow in the details.

Wanting to control the kinds of conditions we face in life is understandable. Let's be sure of who we give ultimate control to!

**Power and authority are always areas where the devil easily creeps in.
How do we avoid this intrusion?**

As Christians, we do have great responsibility, and ultimately great authority as disciples of Christ. With such privilege before us, we need to be painfully aware of how easily we can misinterpret the appropriate application of this authority in our lives. Beware of what the details look like.



Read the fine print! Let's make sure we are not allowing the devil to be in the details of our daily decisions as we move forward.

LET'S EXAMINE THE **AUTHORITY**
WE LOOK TO HAVE



First, let's examine Satan's desired authority:

Isaiah 14:14: (NASB) *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.*

It is interesting that Satan did not proclaim he would REPLACE the Most High; he said he would BE LIKE the Most High. He obviously knew the Most High - the Creator of the universe and all living things - was superior in every way. Satan wanted to be like Him in authority, even though that which he wanted authority over was not his.

I will make myself like the Most High - what did he mean by this? He was incapable of creating like God. But he wanted to have God's authority, the one in charge. That is such an ego-driven approach. We need to be careful because as Christians, we have measures of authority in our lives. Do we handle the authority in a "satanic" way, wanting to be "the one," or do we handle it in a humility-driven way?



King Nebuchadnezzar

There are many examples of misused authority in the Bible. One of the more dramatic ones is that of

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon at the time of Daniel. This king had a front row seat to the power of Daniel's God and should have learned humility, but instead, the power Nebuchadnezzar wielded went to his head.



Babylon flourished under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar until one day the king had a curious dream about a giant, strong tree whose branches reached the ends of the earth, with beautiful leaves and lots of fruit. Animals took shelter under it and birds lived on its branches. A messenger from heaven comes down and shouts to cut down the tree, scatter the fruit and all the animals and birds. The stump and roots were to be bound in iron and brass. The mind of the tree was to change from that of a human to that of an animal for seven times. What does THAT mean? Only Daniel could interpret it. The tree represented the king himself, and this was a message of God's judgment against his arrogance. He would live with the wild animals and eat grass for seven years. That stump of the tree being bound meant his kingdom would be restored to him once he recognized the sovereignty of the Most High.

Let's pick up the story where Daniel is begging the king to be righteous in order to put off the fulfillment of this dream:

Daniel 4:26-32: (NASB) ²⁶And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is heaven that rules. ²⁷Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity. ²⁸All this happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king.

Daniel implores the king to remember all that Nebuchadnezzar had seen and been given by God Almighty. Daniel reminds him that the king knows what God is, who He is and how He blesses or can take blessings away.

Sometimes when we have authority we have a hard time remembering it is not ours, but has been granted to us by God.

Nebuchadnezzar's exposure to the power of Daniel's God should have created a reverence that caused the king to be humble, remembering all that God had done for him through Daniel. But the king did not learn humility.

Instead, he consciously basked in an authority that was not of his making:

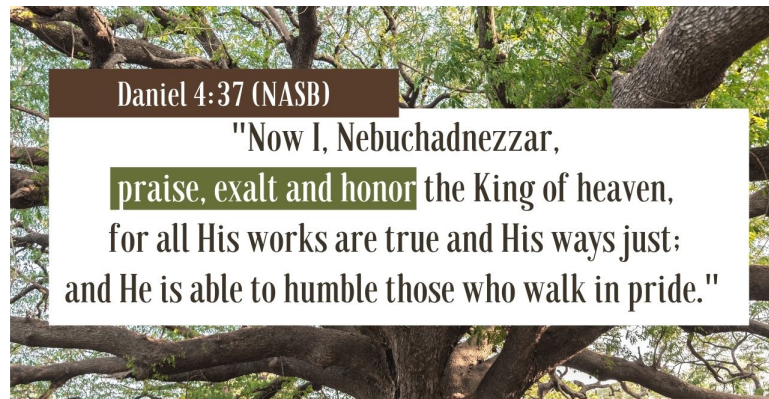
²⁹Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. ³⁰The king reflected and said, Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty? ³¹While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, ³²and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.



Nebuchadnezzar used to rely on the God of Daniel for a time, but the power he was given became too great for him to continue to humbly rely on God. He had come to believe he was the cause of his own greatness. Notice he said, *I MYSELF have built... by the might of MY power and for the glory of MY majesty...* As a consequence for not heeding God's warning, he became a beast in the field for seven years. Once again, the devil was in the details. The same kind of experience on a smaller scale can happen to us. We can be caught up in the power of our own authority and need to be humbled in some way.

Such misrepresentation of authority always has consequences. For the king, the details were based on simple pride. The consequences came within a year. For us, the consequences might be immediate or might be made manifest later. It is easier than we might think for us to take credit for what we have been given!

This did result in a positive ending. After seven years of acting like a beast, Nebuchadnezzar was humbled and recognized that God was *from Whom all blessings flow*. Daniel 4:34-37 is a beautiful expression of his reverence and worship, ending with:



Nebuchadnezzar came to realize that all he had come about because God Almighty allowed it. However, he had to first exist like a beast for seven years because his pride overwhelmed his humility and reliance on God.

In stark contrast, Jesus had powerful authority as the right hand of God and emptied himself of it.

Before everything, Jesus was there with the Almighty Father:

Philippians 2:5-7: (NASB) ⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Earlier we referenced Isaiah 6:8 prophesying the words of Jesus, *Here am I. Send me!* He was willing to give up his position as a spirit being at God's side for something much less in order to fulfill God's plans for man. He became human.

He then emptied himself of the humanity he had been given as well:

Philippians 2:8: (NASB) *Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

We are talking about authority. Jesus gave up the power, might and authority he had in heaven as God's right arm. *In appearance as a man* - meaning the manner of life. He was human.

Instead of reaching after authority, he pursued humility so that God's will could be done. In doing so, he was rewarded with even greater authority than in his pre-human existence.

He is now is at the absolute right hand of power forever and ever:

Philippians 2:9-11: (NASB) ⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is lord, to the glory of God the Father.



We see in these verses the great authority granted to Jesus, *the name which is above every name*. How did this authority happen? Jesus' behavior becomes a pattern for *our* behavior. It cannot be any plainer - in God's plan, humility ALWAYS precedes any exaltation or authority. When we look towards the destinations in our lives, at the measures of our authority in the positions we hold, we must frequently ask, are we properly using our authority?

Jesus is the only being in the universe who had his nature changed by God twice. Jesus in his pre-human existence was called the Logos, which means "word" in Greek ([John 1:14](#)), and a *morning star* ([Revelation 22:16](#)) as a spirit being in heaven. God first changed the nature of Jesus from spirit being to human ([Philippians 2:5-8](#)). As a reward for his faithfulness ([1 Timothy 2:5-6](#)), God changed the nature of Jesus a second time from man to divine being, elevating him to an even higher position than Jesus had originally as the Logos. After his resurrection, Jesus was raised as a divine being as a result of his faithfulness ([Hebrews 1:3-4](#), [2:6-8](#), [Philippians 2:9-11](#), [John 5:26](#)).

For more on this, see:



**Episode 1100:
Do People Turn Into
Angels When They Die?**

Establishing spiritual and human natures as separate and distinct

For us, this humility is properly achieved through love of and obedience to God's will. It comes down to that simple phrase:

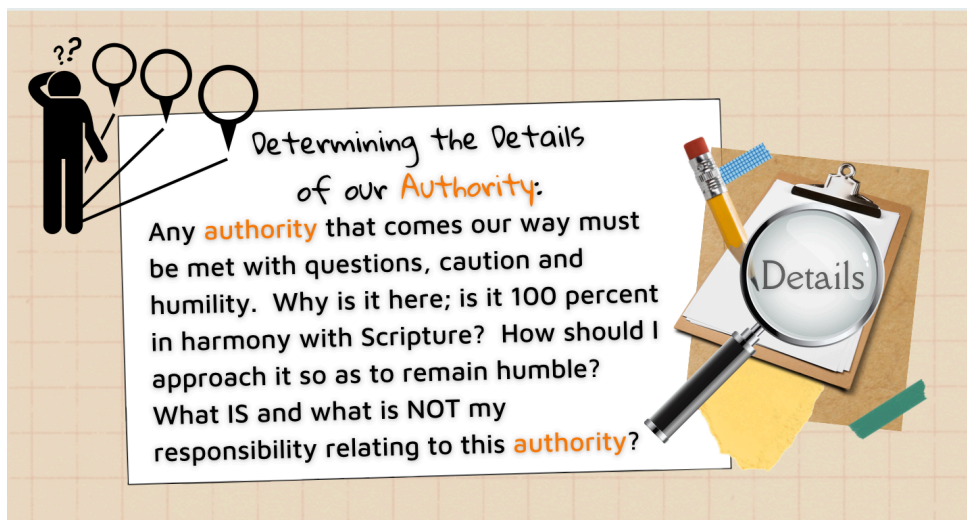
1 Corinthians 13:8-11: (NASB) ⁸*Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*

Love never fails - once established, the early Christian Church no longer needed gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge. However, love - that selflessness of God's will and God's way - always prevails first and foremost. It never ceases.

The Apostle Paul continues, *When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child* - in other words, we must "grow up" in Christ. We cannot continue to be childish as we pursue growth in our lives through:

- ➡ the destinations we want to reach
- ➡ the positions we would like to hold
- ➡ the conditions under which we hold the positions, and
- ➡ any authority that may come with these.

We must continually assess that we are not looking at these things the way Satan did, with avarice and arrogance, but in the way Jesus did, with humility and the wish to further God's will.



We have one more beautiful quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon:

“

Your existence is dependent on the existence of a higher power, and you can't walk around the universe with arrogance. You can't walk about the universe with a haughty spirit because you know that there is a God in this universe that you are dependent on...You are what you are because of the grace of the Almighty God.

”

Amen! Let's approach our New Year resolutions in a more God-honoring way. We want God in the details, not the devil in the details. Look at Satan's example of what not to do and stay far away from his methods and motivations. Try not to have the destinations, positions and authority in your life be all about YOU. Instead, focus on God's will and God's way, walking in the footsteps of Jesus. If we have such things as our only objectives, whatever it is we are doing (whether in the secular world or in positions in the church), will turn out so much better because we are set on godly thinking. Set your mind on Christ in all your decisions and leave the devil out of the details!



Join us next week for our podcast on January 10, 2022
Ep. 1212: Am I Too Bitter to be Better?

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



*So, is the devil in the details of my life?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

Study Questions follow

Christian Questions Weekly
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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1211: Is the Devil in the Details of My Life?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1211-ambition/>

See:



1. What was (and is) Satan's ambition? Why is this kind of ambition sinful? What destination did Satan want? What standard do we use to judge our ambitions? (Isaiah 14:12-14, Job 38:4,7)
2. How did Saul's desired destination differ from that of Stephen? Both were fearless, zealous for God and highly ambitious - what caused Stephen to turn his life to good while Saul did horrible acts in the name of God? Why did God use Saul later in his life? How did Saul (Paul) feel about his persecutions of Christians in his later life? (See Acts 6:8-13, 7:59-60, 8:1-3, 1 Corinthians 15:9)
3. What was Simon's position when using miracles? How did it color his view of the holy spirit and God's power? Why did he want the spiritual authority of the holy spirit? How did Peter address this unhealthy ambition? How did Martin Luther King, Jr. address it? What position did Jesus aspire to? How should this color our views of OUR aspirations? (See Acts 8:9-13, 18-22, John 8:28-29)
4. Did the rich young ruler desire a righteous destination? What conditions were given to him to inherit eternal life? Should we expect comfort and riches when we become followers of Jesus? Why? Should we apply our own conditions to our heavenly service? (See Mark 10:17-22)
5. What were the conditions of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch? What can we learn from the attitudes of these two men? How did reading specific scriptures in Isaiah help the Ethiopian eunuch? (See Acts 8:27-39)
6. What authority did Satan desire? Why was this ambition sinful? How did King Nebuchadnezzar misuse his authority? How was he humbled and what was the result? Why should Nebuchadnezzar have known better? (See Daniel 4:26-37, Isaiah 14:14)
7. What was Jesus' position prior to his becoming a man? What was his attitude towards God and towards his taking up the lesser position of human? How should that move us? How was his destination, his position, his authority and the conditions under which he lived lessoned even further as a man? What is his destination now? (See Proverbs 8:30-31, Isaiah 6:8, John 8:28-29, Philippians 2:5-11)
8. How can self-centeredness hinder our spiritual growth? What can we do to keep from falling into this trap? (See 1 Corinthians 13:8-11)
9. What are your ambitions? How do your desired destination, position, authority and the conditions of your life align with what is outlined in the Bible?