

I had a good week, everything went just as I had hoped, which caught me off guard, because as a child I was always told something bad was about to happen. So when it doesn't, I'm always surprised. I was taught this by mother, whom I love beyond measure, but who believes, even to this day, that it is a mother's duty to let her children know all the things that can possibly go wrong, all the dangers that lurk.

When I was in the 8th grade, and it was time for the 8th grade dance, I asked a girl named Amy to go with me. This was done after much negotiation by our respective emissaries, so there would be no surprises when I finally asked her. My representative met with her representative, who then asked Amy if she would be attend the dance with me if I asked her, which I might not do, but then again I might. So Amy had her emissary tell my emissary that the chances were good that if I asked her to the dance, the answer would be yes. This is how things were done back then, kids. Today, 8th graders just text one another, but back then we had emissaries to act on our behalf.

So I asked and Amy said yes and I went home and told Mom I was going to the dance and that Dad would drive us there and pick us up two hours later, and my mother said, "Oh, be careful, Philip. Young people go to dances, then the girl has a baby and you have to get married and it ruins your lives."

I spent the entire dance in the boy's bathroom, terrified I would end up married by the end of the evening, a father at 14, supporting my family with my paper route and Yellow Stamps.

When I became an adult, I thought about everything that could go wrong, so bought insurance and got flu shots and changed the oil in my car every 3,000 miles and carried two handkerchiefs and checked my spare tire and had jumper cables in my car trunk and learned CPR and the Heimlich Maneuver and kept a ladder under my bed in case of fire. I had a will before I had any assets to leave anyone, and bought a station wagon eight years before I had children, just in case. *Just in case* was my motto, my credo. Insurance, just in case I got sick or died or became disabled or wrecked or went bankrupt or had to change my airline ticket or repair my house. Just in case. Just in case.

Then something terrible happened. All the worries I had carefully cultivated, the anxieties and apprehensions I had tenderly nurtured, fretted and stewed over, none of them were realized, none of the disasters I had anticipated happened. I'm 54 years-old, my life is more than halfway over, and I've had none of the problems my mother feared. No football accident resulting in total paralysis, no poking my eye out with scissors, no mad cow disease, no flesh-eating bacteria, no nuclear conflagration, no bankruptcy, no prison time. Just one fortunate year after another.

What is a man to do when everything turns out alright? What is a woman to do when everything turns out alright? I gave much thought about what to do if trouble came, but no thought at all what to do if blessing came. Maybe that's happened to you, too. It turns out I've been asking the wrong questions. Instead of asking what I would do if visited with catastrophe, I should have been asking what I would do if visited with great, good luck. And what will I do if I am blessed? I've been asking the wrong questions.

Growing up, no one ever said to me, "When you are blessed, you must figure out what you will do. Will your blessings make you grateful, compassionate, and generous? Or will your blessings make you less sympathetic to those who haven't been as fortunate?" I think this was because no one ever thought I was at risk of success, so prepared me instead for difficulty. But even a blind pig finds an acorn every now and then, so here I am. And here you are, blessed and loved and fortunate. All of us healthy enough to be here this morning, all of us cherished by God, all of us able to sing and feel and think and celebrate. So what shall we do with our good fortune? Will our good fortune expand our hearts or shrink them?

I know a woman who grew up in very modest circumstances who married a man who was very successful in business. The richer she grew, the more forgetful she became of her past, the more dismissive and resentful she became of the poor. I knew her and watched this happen.

We spend too much time thinking of what we will do if we are unfortunate, and too little time thinking of what we will do, and how we will be, if we are blessed.

If we have been blessed with love, will we return it?

If we have been blessed with wealth, will we share it?

If we have been blessed with friendships, will we extend friendship?

How will we be, and what will we do, when the best happens to us?