

Making sure the Good never becomes the Enemy of the Best
Six Spiritual principles to apply when considering a major decision such as whether
to move to another country

(Extract from a sermon by John Smyth preached at River of Life Church, Harare,
Zimbabwe on March 30 2008)

**“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to
be” Psalm 139.16**

1. God’s alpha++ plan for my life is pre-ordained. Our task is to discover that plan. We need to beware of being dictated to by questions relating to what seems merely good or better.

“Wouldn’t that be good?”

“Surely that would be a better life for the children”

“Ah, that sounds great”

These may be helpful questions, but the bottom line question must always be “Lord, what is *best* in your *perfect* plan?”

2. Never make a decision out of fear. Deal with the fear first. Jesus is infinitely compassionate. He understands because he knew human fear to the point where his sweat became as drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane as he thought of the Cross ahead of him (Luke 22.44). On the first Easter Day the disciples were still in fear (John 20.19). The doors were locked. Jesus came and stood in the midst and twice declared “Peace be with you.” The following Sunday they were still fearful; again the doors were locked. Jesus appeared again with the same assurance of peace.

I learn from this, first that security is sensible; Jesus did not rebuke them on either occasion for locking the doors! Secondly, we learn that the presence of Jesus is available to us at all times, wherever we are, however dire the circumstances we find ourselves in; and where Jesus stands in the midst his promise is peace. In the garden of his anguish we read that an angel came and ministered to him (Luke 22.43). When you are fearful, ask first for his presence in your midst – in your bedroom, wherever you are – and then why not ask for that angel too? Psalm 34 underlines this approach to fear: **“I sought the Lord and He answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.” “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.”**

3. Beware of unbalanced reasoning. The devil is the enemy of balance. Somebody in South Africa, very conscious of the high crime rate, recently said “ Surely it’s like people moving their children out of London to safety in WWII?” That’s over the top! Bombs aren’t falling on South Africa!
4. Nowhere in scripture do we find God calling his people to an easier, more comfortable, lifestyle. The call always seems to be to the bigger challenge requiring perhaps a little more faith, a little more sacrifice.
5. When we hear of bad things happening to others, or even when we are victims ourselves, we need not be surprised. God is not only perfectly good, but perfectly consistent. He has never promised his people exemption from trials or sufferings. What he *does* promise – and he has always kept his promise – is *strength to cope* with whatever trials he permits. Never forget Satan only exists, let alone acts, with God’s permission. Statistically we may expect our church to suffer as much as the world at large (sometimes more, since we are Satan’s special targets), but it is in how we respond that we are quite different to the world.
6. Remember too, that as much as we naturally shrink from it, trials, tribulations and sufferings, of whatever nature, make up *God’s school of holiness*. Read the middle section of Hebrews 12, and don’t forget Jesus’s teaching in John 15 about pruning the branches. We know, don’t we, from our experience of those who have endured painful and chronic illness, that personal suffering is the path to maturity and greater holiness. You will know of some who have accepted and responded positively to the fears and deprivations and sorrows of life in Zim; you will perhaps know of others who have resented them. What a difference! Some graduate with honours in God’s school of holiness; some sadly drop out.

In conclusion, weigh up all the pros and cons. Seek advice. Apply the “Cs” of guidance: Conviction (personal prayer and scriptural reading), Common sense, Counsel from others, and of course Calling; we all need a sense of God’s call on our lives (that’s not something just for the pastors! And scripture suggests it is often to a particular country or community); then apply the bottom line test. Would moving away be merely good – perhaps good in lots of ways – I’ve been offered a good job and we’ve found a great church, and my gifts are transferable, aren’t they? – and the schools look very good! But is it God’s best? That at the end of the day is the only question that matters.
