



Checkmate: Finding Purpose When You've Been Playing the Wrong Game

Editor's Note: *Thanks to Mark Bishop's song; [The Devil's Playing Chess \(2014\)](#) providing the inspiration for this article.*

In the quiet aftermath of a Sunday service, a preacher notices a young man sitting alone, weighed down by guilt, regret, and what seems to be a lifetime of missed chances. It's a scene that unfolds far too often—someone lost in the maze of missteps, unsure of where to go or whether God even cares.

But as the lyrics beautifully depict, a moment of honesty, humility, and surrender becomes the catalyst for transformation. The song's refrain strikes a powerful chord: "You've been playing checkers, but the devil's playing chess." That single line holds a timeless message—not just for the soul, but also for our careers and callings. Many people move through life making short-term decisions, reactive moves that seem logical in the moment but leave them spiritually and vocationally lost. They're playing checkers. But life, purpose, and the enemy's deceptions often demand the strategic vision of chess.

This song can teach us valuable lessons for Christian career counseling—lessons that point us toward divine calling instead of worldly success, eternal strategy instead of short-term gain.

1. Recognizing the Weight of Misaligned Purpose

The young man in the song feels like a failure. He's haunted by past sins and the sense that he's let everyone down. Many people feel the same when it comes to work and purpose—they've drifted into roles that don't align with their God-given gifts, passions, or values. Christian career counseling begins here: not with a résumé update, but with a heart-to-heart.

It's okay to admit when your path has been off course. In fact, it's essential. The road to clarity often starts with confession, whether it's a moral fall or simply the creeping dread that you're not where God wants you to be. When we bring our burdens into the light, transformation can begin.

2. Understanding the Real Battle

The preacher reminds the young man that he's in a battle far greater than he realized. The same goes for navigating career and calling in today's world. Culture tells us to chase money, prestige, and influence. The enemy doesn't always tempt with obvious sin—sometimes it's a seductive offer to compromise slowly, to take a "safe" path that feels secure but leads away from God's intention.

This is why spiritual discernment is vital in career counseling. Decisions about your profession are never just practical—they're spiritual. We need the Lord, every day, to win the battle. Without Him, it's a game we can't win.

3. Rewriting the Narrative with God's Grace

What's striking is how the preacher doesn't shame the young man—he listens. And when the young man pours out his story, the preacher assures him that failure isn't final. "You're not the first to fail life's test," he says. That reassurance is crucial in counseling: everyone has a story, and everyone can be redeemed.

In the same way, Christian career guidance isn't about polishing up the past—it's about rewriting the future. God delights in restoring broken people and positioning them for Kingdom purpose. From Moses' fears to Peter's denials, God has a habit of turning perceived failures into purposeful assignments.

4. Altering the Strategy: From Checkers to Chess

If checkers is reactive—just jumping from square to square—then chess requires vision, patience, and insight. Counseling that's rooted in faith helps individuals switch strategies. It asks not just "What job should I do?" but "What was I made for?" and "How can I glorify God with my gifts?"

This change of mindset can redirect someone from chasing status to seeking service, from self-fulfillment to Kingdom fulfillment. It may mean going back to school, starting over, launching a ministry, or using business skills for community development. The moves will vary—but the strategy becomes Kingdom-centered.

5. The Power of Redemption: Moving Forward

The young man kneels, weeps, and prays. It's not performative—it's transformational. And in that sacred moment, we see the full picture: reconciliation with God, renewed

direction, and a powerful rebuke to the enemy himself. “Hey devil, I believe that’s checkmate.”

This is the goal of Christian career counseling: not just helping someone find a job, but helping them find themselves in Christ. Once that happens, the rest begins to align. Career becomes calling, and calling becomes mission.

Maybe you, like the young man, feel that you’ve made too many wrong turns. Maybe you’ve settled for playing checkers in a game you didn’t understand. But God is a master strategist. He sees every square, every piece, every possibility. And with Him guiding you, even the greatest mistake can become the first move in a glorious comeback.

When Christ is at the center of your strategy, the game doesn’t end in defeat—it ends in checkmate.

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