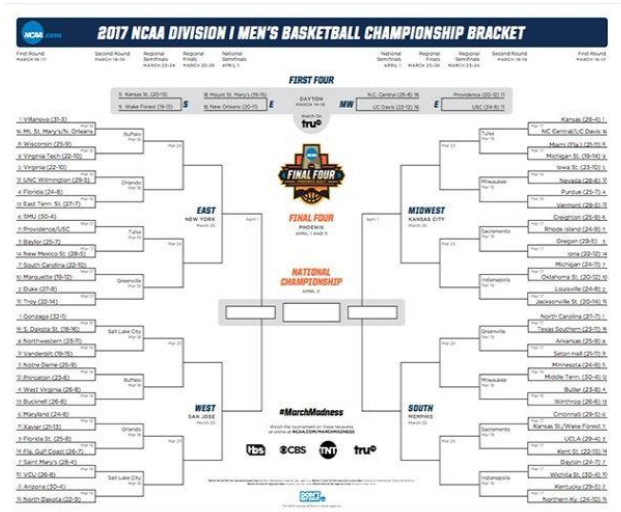


Bracket Buster

Like many Americans our family has an annual competition of predicting the outcome of the NCAA basketball tournament. We jointly participate in an on-line service that tracks results and posts the comparisons of each participating player. Other than pride, there is nothing at stake for the winners.



Before filling out my bracket I listen intently to the television experts and read up on the comparisons of the teams. I study the playing styles of each match-up and then make what I consider to be logical choices. And then the tournament begins.

It is a pretty safe bet that all the #1 seeds will win their first game. In the entire history of the tournament no #1 seed has ever lost to a #16 seed. But, by the middle of the first weekend my predictions were looking pretty bad. Last year's tournament champion, Villanova, lost to #8 seed Wisconsin. In all likelihood, all but those rooting for the Big Ten teams didn't accurately predict the outcome of that game. There

were plenty of other upsets as the first weekend unfolded. This year's national pre-season champion contender, Duke, was upset by a less heralded team from South Carolina. In spite of my research, my bracket was busted almost as soon as the tournament began. Knowing the fallibility of the tournament I always fall into the trap of trying to predict the upsets before they happen. I try to outsmart the bracket. Fun to do, but a recipe for disaster.

As human beings we think we know what is likely to happen in real life. We do the research and make what we think are logical decisions. Even with diligent planning, life never happens exactly the way we think it should. Yet, we hold on for dear life to our predictions. We think we are right and nothing is going to change our minds. Then life happens.

As we make life choices who do we listen to? Whose perspectives control our actions – ours or God's? God clearly knows what is going to happen and he sets us up for success. God knows how the events of our life will unfold and He lays out a path for us to be successful. But, we often insist on our own way. Crazy as it seems, we second-guess God!

So, how do we determine what God wants us to do? You won't find him filling out a March Madness Bracket, but if He did, it would be perfect. You know what He stands for, and if you ask Him for direction, be sure to stop your own babbling and listen for His response.

- After spending time in prayer and the Word, God may plant his answer in your mind. If we seek to please God we have a better chance of making the right choice. (Read Proverbs 3:5-6).
- God may close some doors to you but open the right doors. (Read Revelation 3:8).
- In your prayer time listen for His voice. People typically spend too much time telling God what they want to happen, and asking Him to bless our plans. (Read Romans 10:17).
- As you go about your life be open to God's plan for you by considering the possibilities that life seems to present to you. (Read Jeremiah 29:11).
- Seek the counsel of others who will give you spiritually sound answers, and not just what you want to hear. Follow the counsel that is biblically based. It is the right answer. (Read Proverbs 11:14 and Proverbs 28:26).

God's goals are different than yours. You want to win at the game of life – to be successful. Life is not a game. It is full of ups and downs and seeming upsets that yield different results than you thought. Yet, God knows what those upsets will be. Let your life be about God's Will and not your own. His goal is to set you up for eternal life with Him, and to bring as many others with you as possible. He wants you to serve Him by serving others.

It can't be about control. Our world is careening totally out of control. It all comes down to trust in God. Trust God because He knows the future. Take your eyes off your own predictions and seek the Lord's guidance in your life. You'll be a winner.

Scripture: *Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you (Psalm 9:10). Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God (2 Corinthians 3:4-5).*

Question: Who do you listen to when you make decisions in your life?

Prayer: Most gracious Heavenly Father. We try to take control of our lives. While our intentions are to do the right thing, we often base our actions on our own abilities, wants and desires. Let us seek to do your Will. Amen.