

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

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Choosing To Empower Yourself

by Dr. Mike Armour

Quite often I find myself humming a song I first heard in October 1970. It was one of several show-stopping tunes in a delightful musical named *Purlie*, which swept that year's Tony awards on Broadway.

Set in the deep South, *Purlie* is the story of a young black preacher trying to infuse his congregation with political fervor. To a person the church is made up of impoverished, dispirited share croppers. Theirs is a wretched state, to which they've resigned themselves passively, foreseeing nothing but gloom in the future.

Not so with Purlie. He's cut from a different fabric. No doom and gloom for him. He's a mover and a shaker. The civil rights movement, still in its infancy, has become his clarion call. He's out to change the world. He strides across the stage as a man absolutely persuaded of better days ahead. And he captures his optimistic exuberance in that song I often hum.

Is The World Caving In?

Unless you've seen the musical, you've probably never heard his song. It's hardly a piece to make the *Billboard* charts. But it's a song with a catchy melody and a powerful punch, opening with a question that Purlie poses to his audience:

Do you ever get the feelin' when you read the papers
That the world is cavin' in?
That the animal part of the human heart
Is finally gonna win?

Then he fires back a refrain that sums up his own view of the matter:

Well, it just may be that what you see
Are the growing pains of liberty,
And the world ain't comin' to an end, my friend.
The world's just comin' to a start.
I feel it in my heart:
The world is comin' to a start.

I love that line. "The world ain't comin' to an end, my friend. The world's just comin' to a start."

Who Is Right?

We all have to choose what we will believe about the world. And fundamentally, only two choices are available. Like Purlie's parishioners we can believe that the world is a miserable place and getting worse. Or, like Purlie, we can believe that something magnificent lies just around the corner, despite all that's wrong with life.

So who is right — Purlie or his parishioners? At any given moment there's enough conflicting evidence to argue either side of the question. The evidence is genuinely inconclusive.

Thus, our own choice ultimately boils down to an act of will. We have to decide whether we want to build life around a belief that disables us or one that empowers us.

By choosing to see the world as bad and getting worse, Purlie's parishioners settle for a disabling belief. They don't even notice how much their outlook squelches their optimism, drains their energy, and narrows their sense of a welcoming future. Even worse, it suppresses their dreams and shrivels their potential for joy.

Purlie's belief, by contrast, empowers him. It sustains his enthusiasm. It fuels his aspirations. It summons him to embrace life expectantly. Imaginatively. Confidently. It frees his spirit to soar.

Each Morning's Invitation

Every morning life invites us to affirm afresh what we choose to believe about the world. I, for one, prefer beliefs that empower me. That's why I side with Purlie. Others may choose to believe that the world is in the proverbial handbasket, headed to a decidedly hot locale. But I find Purlie's choice far more appealing. That's why I hum his song. Or better yet, sing it out loud. For me life's simply a lot more fun in a world "just comin' to a start."

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