Improvement:

Sorted based on how many other spots each move invalidated  
I figured that if I chose a spot that would narrow how many other moves I’d have to analyze in the future, I would be able to solve the puzzle quicker.

Complications:  
I tracked how many states it visited total, and without the heuristic, it saw 8562, but with the original heuristic it had to visit 10603 states. It also ran at 150% of the time it took the untouched one to run. I decided to swap …. Explanation … and I found that when I prioritized the move that left the most spaces open (least number of invalidations) it only had to look at 1855 states, and ran in 20-30% of the time. This makes sense because… (only check about 20% of total states visited when used on size 8, 1/8th of the time)

Tried sorting the next variable based on distance from center, failed in both directions (doubles the number of states visited in both reverse and non-reversed, triples the time needed). (abs((size/2)-var))

Has the same run times and states visited when I go 0 to size and size to 0 for choosing the next variable.

Tried counting the