

Backward and Forward

By Bill Denton

Introduction

A. The arrival of the New Year is almost always a time for assessing the past and setting new Goals for the future

1. Actually, I think it's generally a good idea
2. Though we seldom actually follow through on most New Year's resolutions, for some it is a worthwhile exercise to accomplish just one new thing in the coming year

B. It's possible, however, to get caught up in a tug-of-war between the past and the future so that All we do is swing backward and forward

1. We end up being like a pendulum on a clock, but instead of swinging from side to side, we swing back to the past and then forward to the future
2. The only problem is that it seldom gets us anywhere, and there is a very good reason; we don't live in either one

C. Illustration

1. A husband came home one day and told his wife that there was a good possibility that his employer was going to transfer him to a new position in a city on the other side of the country
2. His wife immediately began struggling with some very understandable things
 - a. what kind of house will we find; what will the neighborhood be like; will the children find friends; what are the schools like?
 - b. I remember when we bought this house; we have so many friends that live close by; the children have attended the same school since first grade; they have so many friends right on our street
 - c. what will the new company be like; is this really a good career move for our family; how will this affect our family life
 - d. my husband has always enjoyed his work here; I always thought he'd be in a position to become promoted here; our family life seems so secure now
3. Not a single one of those thoughts is either unwarranted or unexpected, nor would we say that they have no place in considering whether to accept the new job
 - a. however – notice what happens when we get into the back and forth mode of struggling between the past and the future
 - b. something gets neglected, and that something is the present

D. Matthew 6:25-34

1. This is a passage about life and life's anxieties
2. The lesson is that worrying about things doesn't resolve anything
3. The further lesson is that we need to learn to trust God
4. A lesson we often miss out of this passage is that encourages living in the present, and that is the key to producing an effective and satisfying life
 - a. Psalm 118:24 (NASB95)

24 This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
 - b. Proverbs 27:1 (NASB95)

1 Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

I. We Need To Focus On The Present Moment

A. Have you ever noticed how many anxieties are produced either by the facts of the past or the Uncertainties of the future?

1. The past is filled with all sorts of things that worry us
 - a. words we said or should not have said that produced pain and problems
 - b. actions we did or should have done that created heartache
 - c. there all kinds of things, usually failures or defeats of some sort, that often plague our minds and cause us to dwell on things no one can change
 - d. in fact, that's the problem with the past – you can't change it
 - e. "if only" are the words of regret rehearsed so often they become a memorized speech and a standard response

2. The future is also filled with all sorts of things that worry us
 - a. "what if" is the term of the future and they set in motion thoughts that cause fear and alarm
 - b. we can think up a thousand ways to fail or to get hurt for every one way we can think of succeeding
 - c. we see dragons that don't exist and conclude that they are the real enemy, but they are really just the smoke of imagination
 - d. the problem with the past is that hasn't actually happened yet, so we don't really know what's there at all
 - e. instead, we are paralyzed with possibilities that are not real

B. 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NASB95)

2 for He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"—

1. While it is true that God is eternal, and that for him, past and present mean very little, it is also true that God meets us in the present – the right now

2. If you want God to help you, you've got to learn how to focus on the present moment

3. C.S. Lewis -- "the present is the only time in which any duty may be done or any grace received."¹

II. We Need A Sense Of Expectancy and Hope

A. Illustration (quote from Paula Reinhart)

What has helped me the most in developing a sense of expectancy is the memory of how I felt as a little girl. I lived on the edge of my chair, always afraid I might miss something.²

1. Psalm 16:11 (NASB95)

11 You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

2. Despite a life with trouble in his past and more trouble right around the corner, David always thought God has something good in store for him

¹*Discipleship Journal : Issue 109.* 1999 (electronic ed.). Colorado Springs: The Navigators/NavPress.

²*Discipleship Journal : Issue 109.* 1999 (electronic ed.). Colorado Springs: The Navigators/NavPress.

B. What we're really talking about is hope

1. Hope is not mere wishing – it is desire coupled with expectation
2. Romans 8:24-25 (NASB95)
 - 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees?
 - 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.
3. Romans 15:13 (NASB95)
 - 13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Ephesians 1:18 (NASB95)
 - 18 *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
5. Colossians 1:3-5 (NASB95)
 - 3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,
 - 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;
 - 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel
6. Titus 1:1-2 (NASB95)
 - 1 Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness,
 - 2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,

C. The point is simply this – it matters what view of life you have in the current moment; either One of hope or one of anxiety built on mistakes you can't change, or fears that may never Happen

III. Learn To Savor the Moment You Have

A. Illustration

. . . an old preacher explained how his mother taught her seven children to attend to the present moment. This preacher's mother used to pause at unexpected times and teach her children to take a mental snapshot of something lovely. "Pick out something you want to remember about this setting and take a picture in your mind," she would say. That was her way of helping them attend to what was happening around them so that they noticed and enjoyed what they might ordinarily skip right on past.³

B. The truth is we don't always enjoy or appreciate the current moment nearly enough

1. Mark 10:28-30 (NASB95)

28 Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You."

29 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake,

30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

2. When is the last time you really focused on the right now?

C. Let's use that mother's method of teaching her children right now

1. Pick out something you want to remember about this moment and take a picture of it in your mind

2. What would you like to remember about today?

a. some of us haven't looked at today in so long we have a hard time finding anything important enough to remember

b. what's so sad is that we've got plenty of thoughts about the past that we can't change and future that's not here yet

c. in the meantime, you're missing the only reality you have

Conclusion

A. Maybe you're working on your list of New Year's resolutions, and if so, that's fine

1. It probably won't hurt you to assess the past and decide on a few changes

2. It would probably do most of us some good

B. But, what I'm trying to get you to think about is the fact that today is where you live

1. In fact, all of next year and all the years after it are just a series of "todays"

2. You can't live them until they come

3. You can relive them once they've gone

C. Invitation

³*Discipleship Journal : Issue 109*. 1999 (electronic ed.). Colorado Springs: The Navigators/NavPress.