

Leaving The Past In The Past

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“For many people the past is not something pleasant to ponder. It could be filled with abuse, failure, and all sorts of painful memories. Clearly, dealing with the past is not something new to our generation” (“The Past”, Mark Dunagan, www.beavertonchurchofchrist.net). Many Bible heroes also struggled with their past. Rahab’s life must have been filled with unpleasant memories (Hebrews 11:31). Paul also had painful memories from his past, calling himself the greatest sinner (1 Timothy 1:15) and a former *“blasphemer, persecutor, and violent aggressor”* (1:13). Likewise, numerous early Christians faced the same challenges from their past (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Colossians 3:5-11, Ephesians 2:1-3). Solomon looked with pain at the wasted years of his life (Ecclesiastes 2:17-23) to the point that he concluded, *“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them’”* (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Like the wise but vain king, many people go their entire lives carrying regrets until, old and worn out, that is all they have left.

The Myth of Helplessness

God has a way with giving us what we need at various stages of life. For those who believe in their own self-sufficiency, He reminds them they actually have no real power. They are, in reality, quite helpless. Spending a few minutes reading Job 38-41 every now and then is a healthy habit to get in to. On the other hand, for those who are humble and faithful, God provides constant reminders that they have access to tremendous spiritual resources:

- *“Grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence”* (Acts 4:29).
- *“If God is for us, who is against us?”* (Romans 8:31).
- *“...And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe”* (Ephesians 1:19).
- *“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world”* (1 John 5:4).
- *“Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4).

We are never powerless in the face of our bad memories. Life is not static, which means we do not have to remain tied to our regrets. The Living God who created all things and is in all things is on our side. We have immediate access to Him. *“Never fall for the lie that there is nothing you can do. We can do plenty of things: we can pray, spread the gospel, shine the light, spread the salt, reprove, rebuke, and exhort. We can preach the whole counsel of God, we can stand firm in the evil day, we can save ourselves, we can remain steadfast, we can refuse to give up, we can keep on overcoming evil with good [Romans 12:21], we can remain holy, we can keep our behavior excellent, we can reach out with compassion, we can keep up the good works, and we can continue to glorify God. Resist the temptation to be controlled by fear.*

Instead, make your decisions based on the facts. Lead with your head. Always. And your life will be better off at every turn” (Dunagan).

Be Thankful For The Good People

The Bible has many people who could have worried about the past, been fixated on their mistakes, or obsessed with the “would have, should have, or could have” of life. Rahab was a prostitute, Moses was an excuse-maker, Abigail married a worthless man, Paul was a persecutor of the church, Peter denied Christ, John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas, and many more. Instead of focusing on the mistakes of the past, or the wrong influences, these people all had opportunities to move forward and seek promising futures. Let us likewise learn to dwell on the right people and events from our past. The quality and direction of my life should never be dictated by the person who disappointed me (or vice-versa), the sin that became public, the relationship I broke off for selfish reasons, and so on. Instead, I should be dwelling on the day I was baptized, the exciting years spent with a thriving congregation, all the good, wholesome friends I have made over the years, the people who bring warmth to my life.