

Pacesetters Devotional Relating Properly to the Present (1/3)

Psalm 118:24 This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Hebrews 3:7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,"⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS . . .¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Ephesians 5:15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

God has made human beings with the remarkable ability to be conscious of and think about the past, the present, and the future. This ability is evidently part of what it means to be made in God's image, which even higher-order animals seem to lack.

God has also taught us how to relate properly to the past, the present, and the future. Many of our troubles come from our failures to heed God's instruction in this area. Let us consider in this devotional some of what God says about relating properly to the *present*.

The Bible emphasizes that our main attention each day should be on today, living in the present before God. Yes, sometimes God instructs us to think about the past or the future, as we will see in subsequent devotionals. But most of what God says in Scripture is addressed to us to live out *today*. "Today, if you hear God's voice." "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it (*today*)." "Encourage one another *day after day*, as long as it is still called



‘today.’” “Be careful how you walk (*today*) . . . because the days (*today*) are evil.”

To put it another way, living *too little* in the present is just as problematic as thinking *wrongly* about the past or the future. Living in the present before God is a challenge for believers of all ages, but especially for seniors, as J. I. Packer says:

“Live in the present moment. Get into the way of practicing God’s presence . . . This . . . is an important and . . . widely neglected spiritual discipline . . . and its importance . . . grows as we near life’s end. Daydreaming and nostalgia are unhappy habits, making for unrealism and discontent. Like all bad habits, they tighten their grip on us until we set ourselves against them and, with God’s help, break them. Elderly retirees . . . find that a disciplined breaking of them is an increasingly necessary task in life’s last lap, in which steady looking ahead in each present moment becomes a bigger and bigger factor in inner spiritual health.”¹

Very well, then – let us cultivate the ability to live in the present before God. But what does this look like in practical terms? It is easy for me to be focused on the present in unhelpful ways. My back aches today. My neighbor is noisy today. It is cold and rainy today. My favorite time with friends got canceled today. And on and on it goes.

C. S. Lewis gives us excellent advice on how to live in the present. In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, a senior demon gives a junior demon diabolical counsel on how to deceive his “patient.” Screwtape refers to God as “the Enemy,” whose will for us is as follows:

“The Enemy wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself, and to that point of time which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity . . . in it alone freedom and actuality are offered them. He would therefore have them continually concerned either with eternity (which means being

¹ J. I. Packer, *Finishing Our Course with Joy* (Crossway, 2014), pp. 23,24.



concerned with Him) or with the Present – either meditating on their eternal union . . . with Him, or else obeying the present voice of conscience, bearing the present cross, receiving the present grace, giving thanks for the present pleasure . . .”²

Let’s think practically about the last part of this quote from Lewis, phrase by phrase:

- “Obeying the present voice of conscience” – God often gives us present moral guidance. Sometimes He warns us of an impending temptation. Sometimes He corrects us of a current wrong attitude or behavior. As the author of Hebrews says, “Today if you hear God’s voice, do not harden your heart.” Choose a receptive posture to God’s warnings and corrections. Thank Him that He loves you enough to give you this valuable guidance, and focus on following it.
- “Bearing the present cross” – God allows adversity into our lives in order to refine our characters and to deepen our faith in Him. Our natural inclination to adversity is complaint or self-pity, which nullifies God’s desire to give us these precious blessings and (if habitual) makes us sour people to be around. Instead, choose to thank God that He will use this present adversity to do good to you by making you more like Jesus.
- “Receiving the present grace” – God has given us means through which we may daily receive His life-changing grace. These means include talking with Him in prayer, reading and listening to His Word, being built up by His children, and giving His love away to others. Just as with physical nutrition, we need a daily regimen and balanced diet of this spiritual food. And each day, God provides each of us with dozens of unique opportunities to receive His grace. Go through each day with a determination to take advantage of each one of them!

² C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Chapter XV.



- “Giving thanks for the present pleasure” – Ellen Vaughn says, “Gratitude unleashes the freedom to live in the moment, rather than being anxious about the future or regretting the past.”³ The food you got to eat, the birds you heard singing, the friend who visited you – all of these many blessings, along with your wealth of spiritual blessings in Christ – are God’s gifts to you *today*. Enjoy them deeply and thank Him for them!

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³ Quoted in Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Choosing Gratitude* (Moody, 2009), p. 61.

