

Pacesetters Devotional Relating Properly to the Past (2/3)

Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not long for “the good old days.” This is not wise.

Philippians 3:13 . . . one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:12 Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ . . . having no hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Revelation 2:4 “You have left your first love.⁵ Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and change your mind and do the deeds you did at first . . .”

As we saw in our last devotional, God wants us to live primarily focused on the present – the present opportunities to relate to Him and learn from Him, and the present opportunities to serve Him and receive His blessings. In this devotional, we will consider what the Bible says about relating properly and improperly to the past.

The Bible teaches us to avoid relating to the past in ways that will divert us from trusting God in the present. One form of unhelpful remembering is *nostalgia*. Nostalgia romanticizes past periods of life, conveniently forgetting that they also had their share of problems. Nostalgia thus compares the present unfavorably to the past, which discourages us from trusting and obeying God in the present. This is why Solomon warns us that nostalgia is unwise (see Ecclesiastes 7:10 above). When Ezra was rebuilding the Jewish temple, the older Israelites compared it to Solomon’s temple, and wept because it looked



so inferior (Ezra 3:12,13). Through Haggai, God reproved their nostalgia and exhorted them to resume work on the present temple:

Haggai 2:3 “Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? ⁴ But now take courage . . . and work; for I am with you,” declares the LORD of hosts. ⁵ “. . . My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear . . . ⁷ . . . I will fill this house with glory,” says the LORD of hosts.

We seniors are especially tempted to become nostalgic. After all, we have more past to remember! We remember when our bodies and minds worked better. We idealize certain seasons of our lives in ways that exaggerate their positives and forget their negatives. Let us heed God’s advice through Haggai: He is giving us present work to do that will have a great ripple-effect in the future – so let’s get at it!

Another form of unhelpful remembering is *regret*. Though God urges us to learn from our past sins and mistakes, He wants us to appropriate His forgiveness and focus on walking with Him in the present. When our pasts include truly terrible decisions, regret can be a very difficult mental habit to break. The Apostle Paul had unjustly killed many followers of Jesus before he met Him on the road to Damascus. The pain of his past sins never fully left him, but he learned to not let the past dominate his present. When he refers in Philippians 3:13 to “forgetting what lies behind,” he uses a Greek verb that means “to intentionally neglect.” Do you tend to live in bondage to painful memories of the poor decisions you have made? Ask God to help you as you decisively shift your focus away from “what lies behind” and (claiming His grace) on to the present opportunities God gives you.

The Bible teaches us is to remember the past in ways that will help us to trust God in the present. One past event that we should remember recurrently is *our conversion to Jesus*. Paul never tired of remembering how lost and guilty he was when Jesus rescued him (see 1 Timothy 1:12-17). Likewise, he called on the Ephesian Christians to remember how



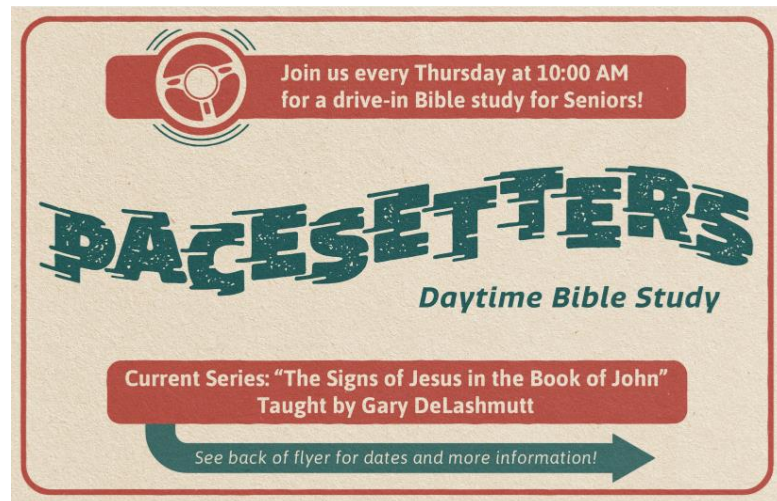
lost and hopeless they were before Jesus saved them and adopted them into God's family (see Ephesians 2:11,12 above). True, some Christians become nostalgic about their conversions, and thus forfeit vital walks with Jesus in the present. But most of us would do well to remember more often the miracle of our conversions. This will deepen our appreciation of God's love and mercy, and motivate us to love and please Him in the present!

Jesus advocated another form of healthy remembering to the Ephesian church (see Revelation 2:4,5 above). Though they still held to the Bible and continued in ministry, they had wandered away from their original appreciation for Jesus' love, and from their love for Him and for other people. How often this has been the case in my own life over the past 50 years! Jesus urges us to change our minds and return to Him – but how are we to do this? “Remember from where you have fallen . . . and do the deeds you did at first.” The order here is important. First, Jesus says, take the time to *think about what it was like when you lived each day appreciating His love and giving His love to others*. This may be painful initially, ask Him to help you to remember. You will find that He will use these memories to motivate you to return to “your first love.” They will also remind you of how to do this – through “the deeds you did at first.” You will remember the sweetness of simply talking to Him throughout the day, receiving His Word with an open heart, and obeying His guidance – including His correction. These “deeds,” which may have become dead religious works, become renewed to be the precious means through which you freshly receive Jesus' love and give His love back to Him and to others!

Lord Jesus, thank You for enabling me to remember the past. And thank You for teaching me how to relate properly to my past. Help me today to turn away from nostalgia and regret. Help me today to gratefully remember how You rescued me from death and lostness. Help me today to remember how You taught me to live in Your love – and help me to return to those ways of simple devotion to You.



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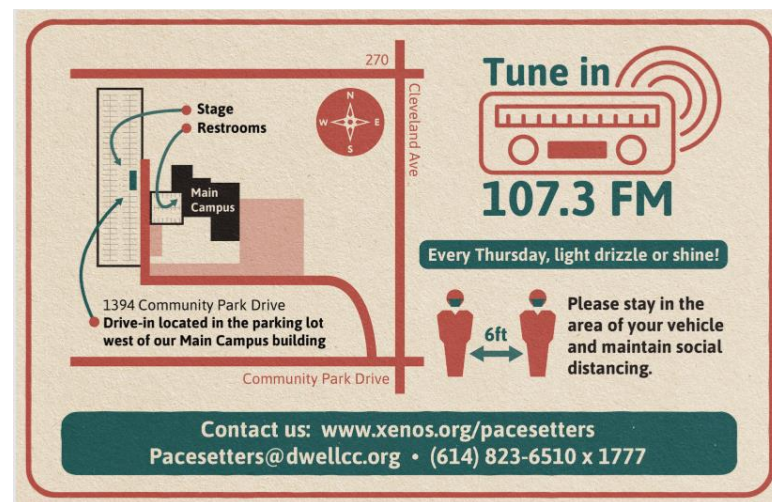
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