

Pacesetters Devotional Relating Properly to the Future (3/3)

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith . . .

Colossians 3:2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth . . . ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

People who are hopeful about their futures live most effectively in the present. If, for example, you are looking forward to going on vacation with a loved one next week, you will probably be more resilient to today's challenges. On the other hand, if you are dreading an upcoming doctor's appointment, it tends to cast a dark shadow on today's gifts and opportunities.

The Apostle Paul discovered that this principle takes on even greater significance when we know that our eternal future is positive and secure. Take another look at Romans 8:18 above. Paul can look his present sufferings square in the eye (and his sufferings were considerable!). Yet, when he compares them to what he knew awaited him in eternity, his future hope outweighs his present sufferings. His anticipation of this



wonderful future gives him a buoyancy in the midst of his present adversities.

Paul's future hope also motivated him to serve others in the present. Take another look at Philippians 1:21-25 above. Amazingly, he actually prefers to pass on from this life so he can be with Jesus forever. But since he knows this glorious future awaits him, he can focus on how to serve his loved ones until he goes to heaven. He is ready to go be with Jesus, but willing to stay to serve others.

How different Paul's perspective is from most Americans – and (truth be told) from many of us. We tend to clutch on to our lives in this world, and live with anxiety about the future. Yes, God says we should think about our earthly futures enough to prepare for our needs. So we should budget our money so we will be able to pay next month's bills. Such practical foresight is part of living wisely. But many of us obsess over future possibilities over which we have no control. "Will I be immobilized by illness in my old age?" "Will I run out of money ten years from now?" "Will my children be too busy for me?"

If we want Paul's buoyancy in the present, we must follow his advice in Colossians 3 – "*Set your minds* on the things above . . . When Christ is revealed, you also will be revealed with Him in glory." "Setting our minds" on the future God gives us through Jesus is something we can learn to do. Consider what the New Testament says this involves:

- It begins with personally receiving Jesus as your Savior. He alone is the Source of eternal life. He is the only One who has died for our guilt before God, and He is the only One who has conquered death to live forevermore. He closes the Bible with this invitation to you: "Let the one who is thirsty come (to Me); let the one who wishes take the water of eternal life without cost" (Revelation 22:17). Have you responded to Jesus' invitation? If not, why not do so right now?
- Setting your mind on eternal life is *not* an exercise in blind faith. There is ample evidence that God keeps His all of His



biblical promises concerning the future. There is ample evidence that Jesus really was raised from the dead to live forevermore. The more familiar you are with this evidence, the easier it will be to trust what God says about your future in Jesus.¹

- Learn more of what eternal life will be like. It is virtually impossible to look forward to a vague abstraction. Thank God, he has given us abundant biblical information about our eternal home! Why not read Oswald Sanders' *Heaven – Better by Far*, which summarizes this information? You'll find that what J. I. Packer says is true: "There will be an effectual elimination of all evil, an endless extrapolation of good, an ecstatic extension of fellowship with the glorified Christ and glorified Christians, and an eternal enjoyment of God's glory and beauty in ways that at present we cannot begin to conceive."²
- Take some time each day to proactively recall and reflect on your eternal future. You can hardly read a chapter of the New Testament letters without finding several references to God's eternal kingdom. This topic was on the forefront of the authors' minds – and it can be the same for us if we look for and ponder their references. Each day contains blessings that are foretastes of eternal life – nature's beauty, time with God, a conversation with a friend. Let these blessings remind you of what is to come!
- Imitate Paul by choosing to compare each day's sufferings with the awesome future that is in store for you. Don't deny or repress your sufferings – but don't allow them to obscure your field of vision. Instead, cry them out to God – and ask Him to help you see them in the larger context of your eternal future. "Yes, my body is breaking down – but I will receive a new,

¹ I recommend Dennis McCallum's *Discovering God* to survey this evidence.

² J. I. Packer, *Finishing Our Course with Joy* (Crossway, 2014), pp, 81,82.



immortal body.” “Yes, I have lost a believing loved one to death – but I will see her again and enjoy her company forever.” “Yes, my earthly resources are drying up – but my spiritual wealth will continue to accrue interest for all eternity.” Practice “Yes . . . but . . .” until it becomes almost second nature.

Here’s a positive closing vision from J. I. Packer: “As seniors’ powers of body, memory, and creativity grow less, so their conscious focus on their hope of glory should grow sharper and their meditations on it grow more joyful and sustained. As this happens, passion to continue being of use to God and His people . . . and what the Scriptures (call) neighborliness, should and will intensify, to the very end.”³

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³ J. I. Packer, *Finishing Our Course with Joy*, p. 96.

