

Looking Forward, Looking Backward

Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these?"

For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this. (Ecclesiastes 7:10)

Looking Back

This verse is about 'looking back.' When experiencing difficulties such as job loss, family issues, lengthy illness, or death, it is easy to drift back to the past, when things were simpler. Missed opportunities, in career, marriage, children, or in one's spiritual life can weigh on us making each day a struggle. "Yesteryear" was easier. There were fewer difficulties; life was simpler.

Have you ever been around someone who frequently relives the 'glory days' of high school or college? Every conversation soon turns to that 'great' event of the past or the way it *was*.

"Those were the good ol' days."

Solomon observes that these words do not come from wisdom.

Looking Forward

The Book of James addresses a similar problem on the other side of 'now.' He wrote about those who would make future business plans without taking into consideration the fragile brevity of life. James suggests an alternative to such boasting:

Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." (James 4:15)

The emphasis is not as much about the thing planned but rather, the uncertainty of life itself. In other words, a person does not know whether it is the Lord's will *that they live until tomorrow*. So, boasting about tomorrow's plans is vain. People who live in "tomorrow" pour their thoughts and efforts are poured into uncertain outcomes to the extent that they forget to live today.

Ah! Vacations!

As a child there were many vacations that would qualify as "the good ol' days." Each day's agenda: play, play, eat, play; no responsibilities.

Ah! The early years!

I remember the first few years of marriage: New wife, new job, bright future, great vegetable garden, new baby, good friends. What was so good about the early years of marriage? I remember most of the hardships with laughter; the others I have forgotten.

Ah! The prospects of tomorrow!

Planning for the future is speculative, but really quite fun. Why? It has no basis in the reality of today. It is firmly secured in "if."

Ugh! Today!

The reality of today is filled with responsibilities and hardships of varying degrees. That's no fun.

Wisdom From Above

Solomon teaches us that it is unwise to live in the past, while James teaches us that it is uncertain to live in the future. We are not taught to shut our eyes to the past and the future. We must learn from the past; and in hope we look to our future eternal home. Yet it is important to live *now*.

Look back! Evaluate, enjoy, and laugh. But don't live there.

Look forward! Be realistic in planning. But don't live there either.

Live today. Today is reality. Today is your residence. Today is where your friends and family exist. Today is life. Meet the responsibilities of each day head on.

Persevere through the hardships and consider how God is refining you in someone better. (See Romans 5:1-5)

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