

THE FOUNDATION OF YESTERDAY

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The call to follow Christ as Lord is a forward-looking call. The awesome grace that has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ compels us to look toward tomorrow. As difficult as that task is, the ultimate challenge of the gospel is even more demanding and daunting. Indeed, we are called to embrace the future, to anticipate it with eagerness, to race toward tomorrow as if it were a dear, long-lost friend.

But tomorrow may not be as friendly as we would hope. The days that lie before us may be significantly less appealing than those that lie behind. And yet, despite all of our fear and doubt, despite all of our uncertainty, God's words echo in our hearing: "Come walk with me...walk with me into tomorrow. Do not ever forget that I am the God of tomorrow even as I am the God of today!"

It is ironic, but one of the most significant reasons for our hesitance to embrace tomorrow is because we so often fail to build on the foundation of the past. We do not rush with open arms into the future because we have such trouble recognizing and exulting in the presence of God in our past. Some of us may not consciously intend to forget the past, but others of us passionately desire to avoid remembering.

Dreams for the future are built upon the strong foundation of heritage. Those of us who are unable to take hold of that foundation will struggle with the most impossible task of building dreams on the foundation of nothing. The problem with such a scenario is not that those dreams will not come true; the problem is that such dreams will never be dreamed. If Christ indeed calls us to join Him in His future, then it is essential that we learn

to build upon the past that He has given. Our personal and corporate heritage is a precious gift from the One who is the Lord of all time--yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

The Error of Segmentation

One of the most dangerous mistakes of our age can be called the error of "segmentation." Segmentation involves the mistaken idea that life can be separated into various parts. The resulting idea is that each of these parts is unrelated to any other part. Our students (and we as well!) reflect this understanding often when they speak of "sacred" concerns as opposed to "secular" concerns. Or they (and we) might speak of the "spiritual" as opposed to the "non-spiritual." The insidious lie behind such a view is the suggestion that there is some part of God's world that is actually removed from his power and care.

In opposition to such a view, it is quite correct theologically to claim that there is no division between the "sacred" and the "secular." In fact, there is no such thing as the "sacred" and the "secular." Because of God's abiding presence in His world, all of God's world is sacred! Because God has not removed Himself from any part of His world, the truly "secular" is an impossibility! All of life is "sacred" because all of life relates to God.

Our typical neglect of the past is simply another symptom of the evil of segmentation. In this case, we cut ourselves off from our past, we ignore its importance for our lives today, and we fail to see God's hand in bringing us to this place in our lives. To fall into this trap is to forget the fact that yesterday has brought us to today. We cannot pretend that the past is unimportant! We cannot do that because the past is the foundation for today. That same foundation is even in this moment becoming the foundation for tomorrow.

The best way to understand what God is doing in our lives today--and the best way to understand what God intends for our tomorrow--is to remember what God has done

in our past. We are the people we are today because of who we have been in the past. And we are the people we are today because of what God has done in our past. Many people today believe that they can neglect the past without penalty. But God calls us to remember. Remember whence you have come! Remember who has called you to this place! Remember those who have contributed to your journey! Remember the promises of God! Remember! Remember! And then build your tomorrow upon that remembrance.

The Ministry of Remembering

For your own sake and for the sake of those with whom you minister, remember how it is that you have come to this place in your life and ministry. After the children of Israel had entered the Promised Land, God reminded them often about their foundation of heritage. In light of the dramatic events and circumstances that had been a part of Israel's past, we might wonder how the children of Israel could have possibly neglected the past. But my past and your past is, quite simply, just as dramatic and powerful as that of the Israelites! God has brought you to this place in your life. He has carried you to this day. Even as He commanded the Israelites to remember, God today calls us to recall His mighty hand in our personal history.

Reminding the children of Israel of His role in bringing them to the Promised Land, God told them that they had been given a land for which they had not worked, cities that they had not built, vineyards and olive groves that they had not planted (Joshua 24:13). Is our story so different today? Most of us serve in ministries that were prepared long before we came on the scene. We take advantage of opportunities everyday that are not the result of our own efforts. We minister to people who have been patiently prepared by others. To claim that our ministries are based upon our own effort is to belittle the activity of God in our lives and in the lives of others.

In remembering how you came to this place in your life, it is also important to remember the people who touched you as you struggled to understand God's call in your life. Be careful not to forget those who made a difference for you. Do you remember those Sunday School teachers (who must have possessed the patience of Job!)? Do you remember those parents and other family members who loved you even when you could not love yourself? Do you remember that college minister who believed in you even when you could find no reason to believe in yourself? As you remember such people, you honor them in God's presence. And as you remember such people, you honor God by acknowledging His hand in bringing you to this place in your life.

In addition to remembering how it is that God has brought you to this place, remember specifically the personal call of God in your life. The picture described in Joshua 4 is a beautiful and rich picture. As the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land, God instructed representatives of the nation to take up stones from the middle of the Jordan. These stones were to be piled up as a monument to God's provision. The stones would serve as a sign. As God explained, "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord."

Do you have any such stones that serve as memorials to significant moments in your life with God? Do you have verses of Scripture that mark key times of decision? Do you have stories and songs that commemorate the activity of God? Do you have actual physical objects that remind you that it is God who has brought you to this place? Obviously, such objects are not intended to become our idols, but they are intended to keep before our eyes the incredible activity of God as He has worked in our lives.

Memories such as these allow us to acknowledge and affirm the foundation of the past. But one additional kind of remembering is also important. Remembering that God has brought us to this place gives us great assurance and confidence. And remembering that God has called us in significant ways gives us hope and strength. But a third kind of remembering is able to touch the lives of others. As we recognize God's mighty hand in our lives, we must remember to bear public witness to others of God's wonderful activity.

We often sing that we "love to tell the story." Telling the story is a good thing. indeed, it is a very good thing! But especially in the context of student ministry, it may be even more important that you be willing to tell your story! How tragic it would be for our students to miss the passion of our experience with God's grace because we chose not to be open and honest with them. Refusing to bear testimony to God's grace in your own life is not a mark of humility! It is also not a mark of maturity. Such refusal may indicate nothing more than a fear of openness and vulnerability.

Your students need to hear your story. They need to hear of your successes--and of your griefs. They need to hear of your certainties--and of your doubts. As you openly live out your faith in their midst, establish your ministry as that of a fellow-struggler. That kind of honest remembering is dangerous. That kind of honest remembering may be costly to you. But the only option is to tell your students only part of the story. And that option will be costly to you--and to your students--and to the cause of Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, the tabernacle was frequently called the Tent of the Testimony. It was a place to remember, a place to bear witness to the activity of God, a place to bear personal testimony. Allow your campus ministry to be a Ministry of the Testimony. Be bold enough

to tell your story. Do your remembering aloud so that you will be reminded of God's grace and power. Allow your students the precious gift of an honest and open environment to struggle and share. Encourage your students to be open in the struggles involved in their experience of faith. Christ has called us to minister in His name...and part of that ministry is the powerful ministry of remembering.

Personal Reflections

God helps us to become His people by allowing and encouraging us to remember. He desires that we face--and embrace--tomorrow by building on the past that He has provided. In 1988, Robert Fulghum wrote a popular book entitled All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. The book caught the attention of millions of readers because the experiences it reflected were so universal. I understood Robert Fulghum's experiences, but my own experiences were not quite the same as his. My experiences reflected more intimately the hand of God in my life. In response to his effort to understand his past, I too wrote an essay describing my past. The essay expresses the simple understandings of a child, but it also acknowledges the mighty hand of God in bringing me to this place in my life.

All I Really Need to Know I Learned as a Beginner...

All I really need to know I learned as a Beginner in the Sunday School of the Memorial Baptist Church in Frankfort, Kentucky. I learned that it was important to listen to the teacher, that it was good to follow directions, that somehow people were nicer to you if you obeyed. I learned that sometimes it was important to get permission, but sometimes it really didn't matter. I learned that no matter how careful you were with the building of your block tower, somebody always came along and knocked it down. But then I learned that it could always be built again...and that's still true today.

I learned to share--whether it felt good or not. I learned to share because it was the right thing to do. I learned about outside voices and inside voices--and I learned that some things were okay to say and that other things were better left unsaid. That's still true today. I learned not to talk out of turn. Come to think of it, I guess I didn't learn that one so well...

I learned that you need to get in line before you can go anywhere. I learned that sometimes you get to be first and sometimes you have to be last, but usually you just seem to fit in somewhere in the middle. That's still true today.

I learned that usually you have to color with old, broken crayons. And I learned that that's okay because you usually get to use a clean sheet of paper...and once the picture's finished, you can't tell what kind of crayons were used anyway. I learned that the things you do at church often get taped to somebody's refrigerator door for public display. And that's certainly still true today.

I learned that it was somehow a privilege to hold the B-I-B-L-E in your hands at group time. I learned that somehow that book was different from my other books. And that's still true today.

I learned a great deal as a Beginner, especially that I was somehow just beginning something. Most of all, I learned that I was special, that Jesus wanted me to be a Sunbeam, and that the church was the place where everybody loved me. I learned that Jesus loved me more than I could ever imagine. No theology book in history has better summarized the gospel than these simple truths, and yet that's what I learned as a curious five-year-old. Sometimes it makes me sad today to remember Beginners, because life sure is different today. But that gospel from long ago is still the gospel today. And the gospel today is still simple enough to be understood by a child. When I remember my past, that's what I remember.

Let us covenant with one another to remember the foundation of yesterday. Let us covenant to acknowledge the hand of God in our past. Let us covenant to build on the past that God has provided. God is the God of all history--but He is also the God of your history and the God of my history. We can embrace tomorrow because of the foundation of yesterday. Praise God for being the God of the past!