

Which Way Are You Looking?

How do you spend your time mentally? How do you view your present situation? Do you seem to dwell on the past? Do you look all around at the possibilities or at what other people are doing, but never seem to move in any direction? Do you look up and forward to the possibilities God has for you?

Keep this in mind as you continue: Looking back to the past and looking around both have a worldly horizontal focus. This view looks at things with a mindset where everything is done or evaluated based on your own abilities, power and strength. Only by looking up and forward are you able to walk toward God and His future for you (vertical focus). Only there do you rely on God and commit completely to Him.

In Genesis 19:17, the angels of the Lord told Lot and his family, *"Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"* Verse ²⁶. *"But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt."* As they were leaving Sodom and Gomorrah Lot's wife couldn't resist looking back, even though she was told not to. She may have just wanted to see the destruction, but perhaps she was still focused on what she was leaving behind. She wasn't trusting what God had for her up ahead. In verses 18-20, even Lot did not want to go too far and chose to settle near a town close by. Both seemed to still be attracted to their sinful fleshly desires.

Consider standing at the counter in a candy store (or bakery, coffee bar, etc). How long do you think you could stand there and resist trying something? Probably not very long. If, however, you lived 10 miles away, you could potentially go on forever and never visit the candy store. The same thing happens with dwelling on your past or sinful desires. The closer you keep your mind to those thoughts and desires, the easier it is for them to slowly overtake you, pulling you away from God and toward Satan. When you accept the Lord into your life and He changes you, you have to begin looking at the future. He gives you the power to

overcome your past; you just have to accept it. Like the song says, you must let it go, lay it down, leave it at the feet of Jesus.

Getting caught in Satan's trap of looking to the past will keep you from God's best. It prevents you from doing what God has planned for you. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

If Satan can keep you going in circles by thinking about or dwelling on past problems, failures or challenges, he keeps you ineffective to be used by God. Satan may even try to convince you God has NOT forgiven you so that he (Satan) can keep you dwelling on your past. You must break that cycle if you ever want to gain victory over Satan. 1 John 1:9 reminds us, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

I've read and heard that it's normal to remember our past and visit there mentally on occasion when something sparks a memory. The danger though is not in visiting the past but in taking up residence there, actually building a house to stay awhile. The longer Satan can keep you there, the easier for him to bring doubt and darkness back into your life. You can't dwell on the past and expect to heal from it or move beyond it.

The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that once we have accepted Christ, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, all things have become new!"* You have to believe God's promise and accept that the old things have gone. When you are baptized, you symbolically bury the old self and rise out of the water to new life in Christ. The old "you" is dead. Romans 13:14 reminds us, *"Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the*

sinful nature.” You can’t be two people. You can’t hang on to the old lifestyle and grow in your relationship with Jesus. If you try to stand on that fence you will be right where Satan wants you, doing nothing. In addition to being baptized, you have to mentally accept that the old you is dead. You are no longer that person.

Here’s one solution: every time a thought enters your mind from the past, picture yourself standing in the graveyard staring at a grave. The grave represents the old you. Then thank God for His grace and His mercy! Thank Him for the new you and for keeping the old you in the grave! Amen! By the way, why would you ever want to grab a shovel and try to dig your way DOWN to the old you when you can now look UP to the NEW you in Christ? Amen again!

Galatians 5:13 says, *“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”* Galatians 5:16-17, *“Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”* The Spirit is in you to help identify and resist the temptations of the old sinful nature. If we follow the Spirit’s promptings, He will guide you into right choices and behavior.

In the Experiencing God Devotional, dated November 10, Henry & Richard Blackaby, it says “People of this world focus on what they’re OVERcoming, while Christians focus on what they’re BEcoming.” The mental process you adopt toward your future with Jesus is critical in both overcoming your past and growing spiritually. You can start to become what Jesus wants you to be. He knows your past and He knows your future. All you have to do is acknowledge Satan’s desire to keep you dwelling on the past. When you accept that, you can let it go and look completely and confidently toward Jesus.

Another old song/saying sums it up well: “nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling;” because my faith and trust are now in Jesus, not on the grave.

Heavenly Father, I thank You for the new life You have given me. I pray You will help me to always keep looking forward to what I am becoming and not to the past of who I was. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

God is always willing to help keep you moving forward in your relationship with Him. To do this He works with the assistance of the Holy Spirit and His Word to create a permanent wedge between your past and your life with Him.