

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

In a dream, after becoming King of Israel, Solomon asked God to give him wisdom, and God did so (read about it in 1 Kings 3:5-14). The Old Testament books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are attributed to Solomon, and Proverbs, at least, repeatedly instructs the reader to “get wisdom.” And the way to get wisdom is to ask God for it.



Wisdom. It's important to make wise decisions about the past, the present, and the future.

Yesterday

We live in a moment of time called “now,” but we all have many memories of things that happened in the past. Also, our present circumstances have been shaped partly or largely by what we did and what happened to us in the past. For each of us, the past is a mix of good and bad; of things we are thankful for and things we wish had not happened.

But the past is history. There's nothing we can do now to change the facts of the past. We can change how we think about those facts. We may be able to identify some things that were not real, though we thought they were, and maybe see some things that were real, though we did not know it at the time.

How can we deal with the past in the best way, so that we keep what was good and valuable, and get rid of things that are harmful or worthless? Here are some suggestions:

Hold on to what was valuable. Was there someone who was special, who loved you and whom you loved? Maybe a relative, or a teacher or a good friend? If so, treasure your memories of that person. If he or she is still living, do what you can to get in touch and say, “You have been special to me, and you still are.”

Consider also the possibility that you were truly loved, but that love was not demonstrated in a way that you were able to recognize. This happens more than we might expect. Showing love takes effort,

and sometimes we don't have enough time or energy (or wisdom) to show love as we should.

Were there times when you were especially blessed, or times when you did something that was a blessing to someone else? Treasure those memories and thank God for those times. Try to share the memories with someone in your family.

Learn from your mistakes. The Bible uses a word, “repent, that gives good guidance. Contrary to much of our thinking, “repent” does not mean “feel guilty.” It literally means “think again” or “think differently.” To repent of a past mistake means to recognize that it was a mistake, and to make up your mind not to make mistakes like that again. Often a thing that “seemed like a good idea at the time” turned out to be a very bad idea. And many times we did something anyway that we knew was a bad idea. We need to look at our past mistakes honestly, and say, “I can do better than that.”

Forgive every past offense. If someone has hurt you in the past, let it go. Hanging on to pain and resentment from the past doesn't do you any good—it is deadly poison to your soul, and often to your body as well—and it doesn't do any harm to the one who hurt you (unless you are in a position to retaliate, which is always a bad idea). God says we are to leave vengeance to Him, and He will handle it (Romans 12:19-20).

The Bible way—God's way—to deal with past offenses is to forgive. Do this: tell yourself you are done with that injury, whatever it was. Then pray for the person who hurt you, asking God to bless him or her, and pray for yourself to have the grace to let go of all bitterness about it. And, finally, pretend you have forgotten about it. With God's help you may actually forget it, and that will be a good thing.

Three words: treasure, repent, and forgive, are the keys to dealing wisely with the past.

Today

The best advice I can give, the wisest thing you can do, is summarized by a sign-off message that Dr. Bob Cook used at the end of his radio program, back in the 1970s: “Walk with the King today, and

be a blessing.” I would add one thing—see, and be thankful for, the blessings God has given you.

Walk with the King.

This means to make sure that you use the guidance God has given you in the Bible—His wisdom and His commands—and that you also ask for and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who has been given to you as a guide and helper. To do this effectively, you need to spend time reading and studying the Bible and praying. And then, to paraphrase something Jesus said (John 13:17), once you know what God’s guidance for your behavior is, you are blessed if you follow it.



Be a blessing. Or as Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” It is absolutely true that when you exert yourself to be kind, considerate, helpful, and forgiving, you bless others, but you also bless yourself. Doing good is much more satisfying and enjoyable than living selfishly. Try it, you will like it.

And be thankful. It’s wise to be grateful for the blessings God has given to us, and take good care of what we have. It is foolish to pine for what we do not have. God knows what we need (Matt. 6:8).

Tomorrow

The future unfolds, moment by moment. You can just let it happen, take whatever the future brings your way, but the wiser way is to make choices now that will help give your future a more intentional shape.

Of course it’s overwhelming to deal with everything at once. Ask God to help you decide what to focus on first. Then pick something, and get to work.

Take stock of your situation. Make a list of the abilities, assets, and resources that you have or that are available to you. Don’t forget to include folks you can call on for advice—a teacher or a relative, perhaps.

Set some realistic goals. Probably the primary cause of disappointment and frustration is having unrealistic expectations. So don’t spend your money on lottery tickets. Instead, figure out what you want your situation to be a year from now, and five years from now. Then ...

Create a plan to reach your goals. Ben Franklin reportedly said, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” Decide what steps you are going to take to accomplish what you are setting out to do. Discuss your plan with the Lord, and also with someone you can trust to encourage you, give you sound advice, and hold you accountable. If you don’t have such a person, ask God to provide someone.

Make preparations to succeed. Plan to make use of what you have, and identify abilities you will need to develop. Figure out how you will overcome obstacles along the way.

Get to work. The road to the intentional future you are aiming for has to be traveled one step at a time, and the only way to do it is to work at it. With a positive attitude, determination, and the Lord’s help and guidance, you may not get to the exact place you intended, but you will get to a good place that the Lord has imagined for you.

Speaking to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah, God said, *“For I know the plans I have for you, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”* (Jer. 29:11) I believe we can say confidently that He has good plans in mind for all of His adopted children—plans that can be accomplished, with his help and guidance.



Of course this short article does not give you a lot of detailed guidance. It isn’t meant to. It is meant to encourage you to be intentional about working out your future path with God’s help and guidance.

Yesterday is history.

Tomorrow is a mystery.

Today is a gift—

That’s why it is called “the Present.”

Use the present that God has given you—the gift of today, each and every day—along with the godly wisdom that He is eager to provide—to make wise choices about the past, the present, and the future.

I wish you Peace and Joy in Jesus—

Brother Roland

Becoming A Happy Person

by Merlin Carothers



We must practice on a piano if we want to learn how to play it well. No matter how much we *wish* we could play a musical instrument or paint a beautiful picture, we must do whatever is necessary to reach our goal.

To become a happy person we must practice being a happy person.

Learning to play the piano is easier for some people than others. Having good hands, and the ability to memorize are very helpful, but people with determination can conquer many obstacles.

Learning to be a happy person is difficult for some people. Some of us face greater hardships than others, but God's desire is for every believer to have His happiness; Jesus came to make it possible for everyone.

If we have serious problems it is easy for us to decide, "I can't do it." Or, "I don't know how to do it." We then end up being unhappy and we often cause others to be the same.

We can decide, "I can't be happy on my own, but because of Jesus I can learn how." Because of Him we can do the "all things" in Philippians 4:13. For example, we can believe we have eternal life. Because of Him we can also do the seemingly impossible by being happy in very difficult circumstances.

Sickness, poverty, and loneliness are a few of the many obstacles we may face. But Jesus offered us the gift of receiving whatever we believe He will give us. True, we have to *learn* how to believe, and that isn't always easy, but we *can* learn if we determine to practice what Jesus taught us. His disciples had difficulty learning, but they *did* learn. They caused their hardships to work *for them*. Some of them recorded what they learned, in the Bible, and we are free to learn from them.

We can learn, and then practice the joy that Jesus came to give us. Some of us have to work harder but we can end up with greater joy than those who have not been "blessed" with difficulties! Jesus said, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28 NIV).

Such a promise may seem impossible to receive if you are weary or burdened, but God makes the impossible possible! Multitudes of people have learned that God wants to give rest to *all* who are weary and burdened. As you learn, you can have the even greater joy of helping others who carry heavy burdens.

Send me your address changes and subscription requests. Also send me any Bible questions you have — I'll try to give you a helpful answer.

I'm sorry, but I do not have any Bibles or study materials to send to inmates. I'll try to include a list of sources next month.

**Brother Roland
PO Box 14
Fayetteville PA 17222**

Heroes of the Faith

This puzzle contains the names of people whose actions are recorded in the Bible, and who, for the most part, obeyed God's commands and did what He wanted them to do. None of them was perfect, except Jesus, of course, but collectively they are indeed "Heroes of the Faith."

Puzzle:

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 S D E S S A B A N R A B G K M Q Y K U N D O G H R P I M D F
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 D A N I E L P Q J C A W P E E E A L I V Q P T R R N L A M M
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Words:

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| AARON | ESTHER | JOSEPH OF NAZARETH | PHILIP |
| ABEDNEGO | EZEKIEL | JOSHUA | RUTH |
| ABEL | EZRA | KING DAVID | SAMSON |
| ABRAHAM AND SARAH | GIDEON | MESHACH | SAMUEL |
| ANDREW | ISAAC | MIRIAM | SHADRACH |
| BARNABAS | ISAIAH | MORDECAI | SIMON PETER |
| DANIEL | JACOB | MOSES | SOLOMON |
| DEBORAH | JAMES AND JOHN | NATHANAEL | STEPHEN |
| ELIJAH | JEREMIAH | NEHEMIAH | THOMAS |
| ELISHA | JESUS CHRIST | NOAH | VIRGIN MARY |
| ELIZABETH | JOHN THE BAPTIST | PAUL THE APOSTLE | ZEPHANIAH |