

NOW IS WHAT YOU HAVE
DECEMBER 29, 1985
II CORINTHIANS 6:2

A traveler got hopelessly lost while pursuing a detour. He finally stopped in front of a house where an old farmer was relaxing in a rocking chair on the front porch. "What time is it?" asked the traveler. "12:00," replied the farmer. "Oh, good," said the traveler, "I was afraid it was more than 12:00." The farmer drawled, "No, around here it never gets more than that. It gets up to 12:00 and then it starts all over again." In a few days we will see a year start all over again.

Some will assess the old year and plan for the new year to be better. Some will leave the old year and begin the new in inebriated abandonment; as if dulled senses and numb feelings can make the bridge. Some will make a lot of noise which perhaps is an attempt to ward off the evil spirits so the new year will be better. Some will end and begin the year in prayer and song. Some will spend the evening within the family circle. Some will just go to bed!

Our observance of New Year's—with one foot in the old year and one foot in the new year—highlights our tendency to live in either the past or the future, trying to redo yesterday or dream about tomorrow. Both enterprises are less than satisfactory. The text today, II Corinthians 6:2, says it well, "BEHOLD, NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME; BEHOLD, NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION." Yesterday is gone; tomorrow is not yet here; now is what you have.

Many people find it difficult to live in the now. Look how Christmas is celebrated. Advent is a mixture of preparation and celebration. It is difficult to postpone fulfillment, so Christmas gets celebrated amidst the busy Advent preparations of shopping, baking, decorating. When Christmas Eve and Christmas Day come, the presents are opened, the feast is devoured, and many feel a letdown. They sit amidst the opened packages, watch TV, and feel depressed. Is this all there is?

A more satisfactory rhythm for celebrating Christmas is to separate the preparation from the celebration. Let Advent be Advent and celebrate Christmas, if not for the entire 12 days from December 25 through January 6, at least extend the celebration for a few days. Remember the song where the true love gave a gift each day of the 12 days of Christmas. I remember Christmas as a child. Christmas Eve was spent with my mother's family, Christmas morning was spent with our family opening the gifts, Christmas Day dinner and afternoon with my father's family, and then for several days afterwards, the neighbors visited us, and we visited the neighbors. The gifts were left opened under the tree to show the guests as they enjoyed coffee, cookies, popcorn balls and divinity candy.

When it is time to prepare, prepare; put off the celebrating. When it is time to celebrate, celebrate. Don't be so impatient to put away the gifts and tear down the decorations. Live in the now. Too many of us spend too much time and energy trying to redo yesterday or dreaming about tomorrow, rather than living in the now. It is a rare experience to be completely "present." Check yourself. When you are listening to someone, how much of your mind is

wandering? Perhaps you are thinking about what you are going to say next. Perhaps you are thinking about what you have yet to do. Can you really listen? Is your mind wandering during the sermon? (Don't answer that!) How about prayer? It is so difficult to concentrate, to focus on God. When the mind is allowed to rest, to meditate, all those thoughts want attention.

How can we focus on the present? How can we be present in the now? Yesterday is gone; tomorrow is not yet here; now is what you have.

First, give yesterday to God. It is good to remember. Memories make up the stuff of life. But, people who live only in memory are called senile. We provide care for them. It is almost impossible to have a meaningful relationship with someone who lives in the past. You can only listen to the same stories for so long.

Give yesterday to God. Give thanks to God for the happy memories. Enjoy them and allow those happy memories to enrich today. Give thanks to God for the sad memories, for they too have influenced your life. Give those sad memories to God. The incident cannot be changed, but the feelings can be relieved. God can heal memories so that they do not cause depression.

Confess the mistakes, the errors, the sins of yesterday. If you hurt someone, confess it. You cannot redo your mistake. You cannot say the words over, or redo the deed. What is done is done. But, you can confess it to God, and if the person is still alive that you hurt, don't let the sun go down today before you talk to that person, or write. If he/she won't listen, you have done what you can do. Confess your sin to God, accept God's forgiveness, and leave the incident in God's hands.

If you have been hurt by someone else, if you have been mistreated, confess your anger to God, confess your desire for revenge and retaliation. Give the incident to God. Don't let those negative feelings linger within you, poisoning your system, affecting your attitude and actions, preventing you from living the now,

Give yesterday to God with prayers of thanksgiving or prayers of confession. Prevent those memories from disabling the now. Old guilts have a tendency to invade and interfere with the present. Offer them to God, so that you can live today, live in the present, with your full capabilities and power.

Secondly, give the future to God. Put tomorrow in God's hands. Dreaming, planning, hoping are important to productive living. It is necessary and fun to dream, plan and hope. But, don't live in tomorrow. It is sad when folks cannot really enjoy Christmas because they are either lost in memories of past Christmases or already planning the next. It is sad to deny today because your head is in tomorrow.

Some folks live in a fantasyland. "If only I had taken that job," or "if only I had gone to another school," or "if only I had married someone else," or "if only I lived in California." Well, you are here. Today is it. Now is what you have. You don't have the fantasy. You don't have tomorrow. Today is what you've got.

Give tomorrow to God. Put it in God's hands. Trust God with your future. "Don't worry," said Jesus. "Don't be anxious about tomorrow," he said. "Let tomorrow take care of itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day." Jesus was a realist, wasn't he. You've got enough today, why ask for more? Why try to take on tomorrow's problems also? Take all your worries about tomorrow, take all your dreams about tomorrow, take all your fantasies, all the "if onlys", and offer them to God in the prayer, "Thy will be done." Let God's will be done. Give tomorrow to God.

Thirdly, embrace the NOW. Now is what you have. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow is not yet here. Now is what you have. Embrace it. Now is a gift. Today is a gift from God. You are not living today because of your good deeds, good looks, or whatever. You don't deserve to live. Today is a gift from God. Harold Rogers writes in On the Other Side of Tomorrow,

Every day is a gift from God. Welcome it joyously. Clasp it to you. Spend it wisely. Waste none of it in idleness. Save some for contemplation. And when evening comes--thank God for his gift, the day you have just lived.

There is wisdom in that passage except for the admonition to "waste none of it in idleness." In this pressurized age in which we live, it is good sometimes to be idle. Our lives are too hectic, harried and busy. We need time to do nothing. Children need time that is not planned, time for them to make up their own games or fantasies. I need time to be lazy and not feel guilty.

Embrace the now. Embrace your life. Clasp it to you. Take yourself in your arms. Thank God for you. Thank God for your talents, gifts, and opportunities. Hug yourself. You are a beautiful person--you old, sweet thing, you! Thank God for your feelings. Embrace whatever is going on in your life. Embrace even the pain and suffering. Don't deny or try to escape. Suffering, hardship, problems are learning experiences. Without pain, joy is shallow.

Embrace those around you. Be present to the loved ones in your life. Make each day count. Don't let the hurts of yesterday affect your actions towards your loved ones today. Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do now.

Try this exercise. Imagine the doctor has given you five months to live, or five weeks to live, or five days. What would you do? How would you make each precious day, each precious moment count? Whatever you feel you would want to do in your last five days, do it now. Have you planned to take a long walk one of these days? Do it today. Have you planned to finish a job around the house? Do it. Do you need to tell some folks you love them--spouse, kids, parents, friend? Do it. Do you need to get right with God, ask forgiveness, commit your life to Christ, offer yourself for God's service? Do it. Now is what you have. You can't plan on tomorrow.

A young woman named Anonymous wrote a poem called Things You Didn't Do.

Remember the day I borrowed your brand-new car and I dented it? I thought you'd kill me, but you didn't.

NOW IS WHAT YOU HAVE

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Remember the time I dragged you to the beach and you said it would rain and it did. I thought you'd say "I told you so," but you didn't.

Remember the time I flirted with all the guys to make you jealous, and you were? I thought you'd leave me, but you didn't.

Remember the time I spilled strawberry pie all over the rug of your car? I thought you'd hit me, but you didn't.

And, remember the time I forgot to tell you the dance was formal, and you showed up in jeans? I thought you'd drop me, but you didn't.

Yes, there were lots of things you didn't do. But, you put up with me, and you loved me, and you protected me. And there were lots of things I wanted to make up to you when you returned from Viet Nam, but you didn't.

Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow is not yet here, and may not come. Now is what you have.