

Daily Devotional, May 28, 2020 Stop Looking Back

"But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt." Genesis 19:26 (NIV)

In Genesis 19, God told Lot and his wife to go and not look back when they left Sodom and Gomorah, the cities he was destroying. Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. That is a most disturbing story. Did God do that only because she was disobedient? Or could it be she wasn't sure if she had left one of the burners on the stove lit?

62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Luke 9:62 (NIV)

In the New Testament, Jesus says to move forward with the plowing and not look back. It seems obvious that he's not literally talking about plowing, so what's the message here? How are we to understand verses like these? Are we to look only towards the future and never dwell on the past? Do these passages mean we should never think about things that happened to us last week, last month, last year, or many years ago? Is it wrong to ever look back? Are we disobeying God if we think back on circumstances or relationships from our past?

Not necessarily. When Lot's wife looked back, I believe she was longing for one last glance at a life full of sin, and ways of living that were displeasing to God. That verse about plowing and not "looking back" seems to be about not longing for the kind of life we left behind to follow Jesus, and not putting anyone or anything else before God. In that previous life, sin and selfishness were in charge, and God doesn't want us to be tempted to return to those ways. He wants us to turn instead to His ways.

In this case, "forgetting" is like saying "don't dwell on it" or "don't keep replaying it." God is telling us to learn from the past and use those lessons to keep a proper perspective on our lives. It's not healthy to spend enormous amounts of time replaying our sins and mistakes, or the sins and mistakes of others in our minds over and over. Why? Because too much energy put into looking backwards doesn't leave enough for the present and future.

If we are repentant and ask for forgiveness, whether the other person forgives us or not, God will. And from that point on, God doesn't want us looking behind so much that we can't see where we're going. If we're not careful, we can get too caught up in picking apart the details of things that have already taken place and can't be changed. We can become discouraged or angry or ashamed, to the point of condemning ourselves or being bitter towards those who have wronged us.

Another reason to let go of the past is that too much looking back may pull us back towards sin. Remembering former aspects of our lives in certain distorted ways can tempt us to think we're "missing out" on something by obeying God and following Jesus. We can be tempted to return to old patterns or behaviors that gave us a false sense of security, but were bad for our better well-being.

If our past is getting in our way, we must figure out how to put it in its proper place, so we don't keep tripping over it. This may involve forgiving ourselves and others and accepting the things we can't change about our lives or about other people. This is a "coming to terms" that needs to happen so that we're not dragging all sorts of baggage along with us, as we try to move forward.

God knows we are not all that capable of "forgetting" significant choices or things that have happened to us. Some things are not easily forgotten. What is important to remember is, our past shapes who we are in the present - and helps us to understand ourselves and our world in general. Experience is how we gain wisdom and learn valuable lessons. Learning from a mistake (whether it is ours or someone else's) and remembering the lesson helps us not to repeat that mistake over and over again. Over time, our choices will improve. The lesson is in learning how God brought us through those trials, how He has healed and changed us. When the emphasis is where it should be, understanding our past helps us give glory to God in the present, and points us toward a glorious future.

Prayer: Dear God, Help me to not live in my past, but to learn from it as I prepare for what lies ahead. I don't know what the future holds, but I know only You hold the future. In that knowledge, may I face each day fearlessly. Bring me to a better tomorrow. Make the days of my life and the life in my days overflow with love, kindness, gratitude, and appreciation. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.