

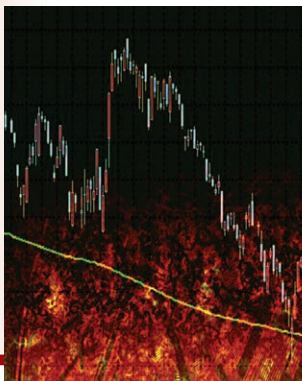
Facing the Future Without Fear

Social unrest. Unemployment. A stock market up one day and down the next. It's not hard to find things to be anxious over today. If it's not national crises, a variety of everyday problems can disturb us: the lump discovered on a breast; the divorce papers served yesterday; the wayward teen who felt the tug into rebellion; dwindling retirement funds.

If you find that fear of the future immobilizes you, try overcoming it through the simple act of remembering.

Remember the Creator

The God who created you controls your life. He who spoke the universe into existence understands economic downturns and oversees counsel-



ing sessions and chemotherapy. He rightly asks, “Who is my equal?” (Isaiah 40:25).

Because of God’s ownership, life, with all its fearful debris, rotates around the fixed axis of His divine sovereignty. “This is my Father’s world,” the hymn says — not yours, not the government’s, not the surgeon’s who will be operating in the morning. This doesn’t mean that bad things won’t happen but that God will help you when you don’t know what to do. You can count on Him to give sanity in the midst of panic, and work bad into good — if you love Him (Romans 8:28).

It’s easy to forget this. One negative report from the blood test, a down day on Wall Street, and God shrinks. But the truth is, if you rightly remember the Creator, *you* shrink — not God: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, . . . what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:3, 4).

Despite what you see or can’t see, what you feel or dread, God’s world has purpose and plan. Mistakes and mishaps do not have the final word.

Remember the past

God knows that our perspective of the future is often limited to what we can see. That’s why the refrains of “remember” and “do not forget the past” lace the Scriptures together. If you fear the future, try remembering “the deeds of the Lord” (Psalm 77:11).

Let Psalm 105 show you how. It traces God’s work in behalf of the Israelites: He protected them from oppression; permitted Joseph to

be enslaved, planning the key to future survival through him; made the Israelites fruitful; empowered Moses and Aaron to perform miracles before Pharaoh and the people; sent plagues and led the Israelites out of Egypt; guided them with fire at night and a cloud by day; supplied food and water in the wilderness; gave them lands of other nations.

Notice the detail; it's there to prove how essential a good memory is. Failing to recall God's specific help in the past puts a person in danger of failing to depend on Him for the future.

That's what happened to the Israelites: "They gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses . . ." (106:7). When the people faced new challenges after their deliverance, they refused to wait for God's counsel because they had forgotten what He'd done (v. 13). In no time, forgetfulness gave way to rebellion, impatience, murmuring, complaining, envy, idolatry, and ultimately unbelief.

Likewise, when fear overwhelms, you tend to forget what God has done for you in times

Fear Phrases

Number of times "Be not afraid" or a similar phrase appears in the Bible:

about 52 — one for each week of the year

Number of times "fear not" or a similar phrase appears in the Bible:

about 100 — two for every week

past. By now, you've probably racked up enough mileage to offer a fair survey of the road behind. Where in your journey did God intervene? When did He send a messenger of hope? When did He change an attitude and bring peace? How did He supply your needs? In custody battles, court appearances, caring for aging parents, adjustments to singleness, long-term illnesses, and separation through death and divorce, you can trace God's providential hand.

You might try writing your own version of Psalm 105, especially if you find yourself more prone to the attitude in Psalm 106. Recounting the Red Seas in your past means that you can once again "Look to the Lord and His strength [and] seek his face always" (105:4).

Remember, God remembers

God has a unique memory. When we repent, He remembers our sins against us no more (Isaiah 43:25). But He never forgets those children He formed in the womb (49:15, 16).

Genesis offers an account of yet another dimension of God's memory. Keeping it in mind will help you place a firm grip on fears about the future.

God decided to destroy the earth with a flood. But He promised to save Noah if he followed the instructions for building an ark and loaded family and animals in it. *Will the pitch hold?* Noah may have wondered. *Is the wood strong enough to endure the torrents? Once the ark comes to rest, then what?*

For forty days God remained silent. The writer of Genesis says that after the waters flooded

the earth about five months, “God remembered Noah . . .” (Genesis 8:1). This doesn’t imply that God had forgotten His servant for a while and suddenly recovered His memory. It means that God was always mindful of His promise to preserve Noah, his family, and the animals (6:18) but had delayed fulfilling it.

A wind blew over the earth, and the floodwaters receded. In the seventh month, the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat and with it rested whatever doubts Noah may have had. When conditions were right, God permitted Noah, his family, and the animals to disembark into a fresh, clean world.

God has made many promises to us in His Word. Consider which ones you can look to when you’re paralyzed by fear of the future. He pledges strength and aid when you’re terrified (Isaiah 41:10). He vows that the waters will not overwhelm you, that the fire won’t scorch you (43:2). He promises perfect peace if you keep your mind riveted on Him (26:3).

Holding steady

Richard Fuller writes about an old seaman’s wisdom: “In fierce storms we must do one thing, for there is only one way to survive: we must put the ship in a certain position and keep her there.” Fuller likens our soul to a ship in a storm: We must put it in one position and refuse to move it, no matter what.

When the waves of fear roll you from side to side, exercising your memory holds your soul in a steady position of trust. The Creator’s control, His past help, and a sharp memory of His prom-

ises — with these, you can face the storms of fear with confidence.

— *Sherri Langton*

Scripture quotations noted *New International Version* or NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.