

How often are you haunted by things you wish you could go back and change? Do you ever wish you had chosen different words or made better decisions? How do you handle such thinking? And when such thoughts become an obsession, we all know how they bring meaningful living to a halt!

That has become even more of an issue with today's instant forms of communication as too often we hit the send key before we take time to think about how someone else might react. How often have we posted on Facebook and realize someone we never thought would see the post found it? When you hear the phrase "you can never go back again" does that make you frustrated, sad, or is it be a reminder that life can only be lived in the today?

This is more than just practical advice! It is a theological issue in terms of our lives of faith. How many Bible stories had to do with this same issue? Adam and Eve couldn't bring Paradise back. Cain couldn't restore Abel to life. Joseph's brothers sold their brother and lied to their father and that would always haunt them. Jacob's life was filled with guilt at stealing his brother's inheritance.

Remember what happened when Lot's wife ignored God's warning and during her escape looked back and was literally stopped in her tracks because she just had to look back! David murdered to commit adultery and a son died in the process. Looking back changes nothing at all.

One day, Jesus was engaged in teaching, healing, and sharing the Good News of God's love. Some motivated followers said, "We like what we hear. We want to be disciples. We want to follow you!" And then, just as happens so often with each of us, came the hesitancy, the qualifiers, and the excuses as they wanted to control what it meant to follow Jesus.

One started thinking about the comforts of home saying, "I'll come, but not yet." Another was obsessed with death and couldn't get past his grief. He too, changed his mind. Another said, "I have family obligations and need to figure things out." Jesus' response might seem insensitive, but he was setting the table for any followers who just can't get their eyes off the rear-view mirror.

Jesus' words were not meant to hurt feelings but to remind that actions needed to match words. Discipleship means a new lifestyle and is geared toward today and not yesterday. It guides us into future rather than allowing us to remain rooted in our past. Jesus said, "you can't have it both ways."

It is impossible to walk into a new room if the old room is where you want to keep sitting. You can't walk forward if you are backpedaling at the same time. Luke's account reflects on people who said, "we are ready to follow," but weren't.

How could Jesus have met John the Baptist at the Jordan if he was still wanting to look at baby photos from Bethlehem? How could he have asked disciples to leave their past and if he hadn't already done the same? Could He have

become our sacrifice if last week's events were a distraction? How could death have been destroyed if Jesus had said, "I don't want to leave the comfort of my life?" He modeled the behavior he asks of us.

We know how past issues can paralyze any present action. Discipleship means if you commit to following Jesus, you have to follow Jesus. You can't live in two places at once. If Jesus leads, then it is Jesus alone whom we must follow.

Elisha was called by Elijah to be next prophet. He first said, "OK, but first let me go home to say goodbye. Elijah's response was, "I don't think you understand!" The point of sacrificing twelve yoke of oxen was for Elisha to surrender his past vocation as a farmer. Now, he couldn't go back! Only when there was nothing to draw him back to the past, was he ready to move into tomorrow.

And the action of sacrifice means the past (in this case, oxen) is not wasted but becomes a blessing as it offers service to the present and future. Either one jumps in the pool or puts a swimsuit away. Either we live with hope and faith or become trapped by the stuff you cannot let go of. Discipleship is a lifestyle, not an occasional hobby. Once you turn the corner, you are on a new road.

There is a time and place for reviewing the past. In counseling, one must first understand past events before dealing with present problems. *That is not to "relive" the past but to "relieve" the past, so that it doesn't overwhelm present.*

That is why our worship pattern is so instructive for daily living. We begin with confession (which is our review of what the past has looked like.) Then we hear the good news of Absolution (where Christ announces that grace frees us from anything in the past.) And then we are free to begin to grow, to celebrate, to worship, to serve – in other words we are free to become disciples!

There is a flight condition called *spatial disorientation*, when there is no discernible horizon; for instance, when flying in clouds or on a moonless night. A temptation for the pilot is to trust what is most familiar (senses like sight) but only by trusting the gauges and what they indicate can the pilot and crew be safe.

*Spiritual disorientation* happens when distractions look at my old life rather than new life in Christ. No sensory memory, past actions, or history will save me. It is only faith in Christ that will enable life to blossom and bloom.

The Romans had a god named Janus (with two faces so he could look two directions at once. That is where the name January comes from, standing between the old year and the New Year. And we all know how that is the month when we can't remember which date it is – the past or the new one.

Jesus left heaven behind and accepted ministry that was focused on servant love as a sacrifice for us and the power of our new lives. His call for us is to do the same. It is not that we ignore where we have been, but we live firmly in the present. In other words, let the dead bury the dead. That isn't being insensitive but simply that if we are alive, we live in Easter not a tomb!

Jesus was clear when he said, "no one who puts his hand to plow and looks back is fit for kingdom of God." If you have been forgiven, don't look back. If you are to follow Jesus, watch where he leads! It is why we are told not to text and drive. You can't focus on where you are going if your eyes are not on the road. Distractions can be deadly and following Jesus means that no matter what we encounter, we are guaranteed of a safe trip and a loving journey.

Remember what we just heard from Paul's letter to the Galatians. *"Christ has set us free, do not allow yourselves to become slaves again ... If we are to live in the Spirit, we must be guided by the Spirit."* (Galatians 5:1,25)

It is not about blissful ignorance but joyful anticipation of each new moment in a journey with God as loving partner. Why revisit what will only distract you from what comes next. You are forgiven, we ever go back? That is the freedom that allows us to truly follow Jesus and live in peace!