

Never Forget Forever

*“Remember your creator all the days of your youth”
Ecclesiastes 12:1*

As kids didn't we ask each other, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I never heard anyone say, "a project manager" or "technical support specialist"; rather more typical answers were, "an astronaut," "a doctor," or "the president of the United States." When we're 5 or 6 years old, dreams of the highest goals can be ours without the least bit of scrutiny. It's as if that song were true, "When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are; anything your heart desires will come to you." As kids we don't realize that things don't work that way. However, at that age we're about as far away from our careers as the stars, so our aspirations might as well be out in the heavens too.

But with maturity we usually formulate plans based on realistic expectations rather than imagined ones. Consequently, a strategy for our future is adopted with specific goals, education and training. Such plans come more readily to some than others; there were classmates of mine who knew exactly what they wanted to do from the get go. However, I wasn't wired like that; rather my goals were loosely set and therefore I was prone to changing courses mid-stream. At first my familial musical background spawned an interest in becoming a concert flutist. Yet this lost appeal when I realized, well, I just wasn't that good; moreover it probably wouldn't entail the glamorous life I envisioned. So I studied science but, to keep more options open and increase my marketability, I peppered my studies with photography and biomedical art classes. Indeed, my renaissance tendencies meant more time in school but my parents, probably realizing I was a late-bloomer, remained supportive. After all it was better for me to bloom late than not at all.

Subsequently I chipped away at the curricula necessary for a degree in Microbiology, though I hadn't the foggiest notion of what I'd do with it. But during this period God intervened, and though His Plan wasn't listed as a major in the Long Beach State University catalogue, it nonetheless trumped my plans. And even if it wasn't something I consciously pursued, when confronted with it I recognized it was by far the best thing I had ever encountered.

Thus my focus and momentum shifted yet again. But rather than advancing halfheartedly, my newfound spiritual core demanded its place as the nucleus around which everything else emotional, motivational and vocational revolved. Hence going forward, some things needed to be left behind and though it might hurt, I found solace in the wisdom of a friend, "You'll never look back and regret anything you gave up for God." Years later I look back and indeed don't regret anything left behind for Him, for He is like that treasured pearl of great price; anything else can't compare or bring happiness. Furthermore, when "everything else" isn't placed front and center, it gets added, minus the worry it might fail (Matthew 6:31-33).

Within this context I completed my education and finally earned a Master's degree in 1985. Late bloomer that I was, academia finally caught on, so maybe I could have successfully pursued a doctorate. But in hindsight, never having done so is no tragedy; rather having missed Him would have been the tragedy. So in light of the sufficiency of God's grace, what's to regret? Moreover, He provided a job that has suited me well for more than 21 years; such tenure with one company is rare these days, yet it's been a blessing rather than something I've had to grin and bear.

But at some point I, like everyone, must recognize that some things will never be for me in life. To the earthly mind fixed on the hopes of this life, such losses bring sorrow. Yet those in Christ can leave sorrow at the Cross, for our hope lies not in our past, but in what remains ahead. For in God's presence in eternity, every "never" of this lifetime is outshined by the glorious "forever" He promises:

What never was:

*We may never have had an illustrious career
But we're never without an illustrious future in Him
His glory is ours, forever (John 17:22)*

*We may never have owned a big house
But we're never denied a place in His mansion
He has prepared a place for us forever (John 14:2)*

*We may never have borne children
Yet we need never be fruitless
Eternal gold, silver and precious stones remain forever (1 Corinthians 3:12-14)*

*We may never have married
But we're never divorced from Him
We're His beloved, forever (Romans 9:25, Revelation 21:9)*

What never is:
*Though we never adorn ourselves in fancy clothes
Our spirit is never without adornment
We're clothed in righteousness, forever (Revelation 19:8)*

*Though we never win awards or contests
Our godliness is never in vain
He will reward us abundantly for it, forever (Mark 10:29-30, James 1:12)*

*Though we may never dine in fancy restaurants
We're never without the Bread of Life
Eating it makes us live forever (John 6:48-51)*

*Though we never socialize with dignitaries
The King of kings is never unavailable to us
He provides His Throne of Grace and fellowship, forever (Hebrews 4:16)*

*Though we're never free from financial debts
We never carry the eternal debt of sin
Our transgressions are removed forever (Colossians 2:14)*

What never will be:
*Even if our name will never be carved on a monument
It will never be erased from His book
Our name is written in Heaven forever (Luke 10:20)*

*Even if we never journeyed to an exotic paradise
We'll never be without Him, in all of life's journeys
And we'll be with Him in paradise, forever (Revelation 2:7)*

*Even if we never held great power over people
We'll never be denied grace sufficient for life and godliness
The power of His Spirit is ours forever (Ephesians 1:13, 2 Timothy 1:7)*

*Even if we never have the approval of family
We'll never be outside the family of God
We're accepted in the Beloved, and His family forever (Ephesians 1:6, 1 John 3:2)*

Therefore, infinitely more important than any temporal thing missed are those eternal things never missed; only they really matter in the endless life awaiting us beyond the end of this life.