

## "Life In The Rear-View Mirror"

During the 1920's, Arthur Berry was considered the world's most famous jewel thief. However, Berry's notoriety was not due to the fact he was a thief, but because of his rather ingenious, bold style of only stealing from the elite rich and only taking high class jewels. Known as a "Gentleman thief," Berry was always well-dressed and well-spoken, which enabled him to mingle with the high-brow socialites of his day. His downfall came when a tip out of jealousy notified the police of his whereabouts. He would spend the next eighteen years behind bars where he made up his mind he was through being a jewel thief. After his release from prison, Berry settled down as a respected citizen in a little town in New England where no one knew of his past. All was going well with him until someone recognized him as the famous jewel thief. Reporters came in from all of the large city newspapers to interview him. A young reporter asked him this question, "Do you remember who it was that you stole the most from?" Berry answered, "The man from whom I stole the most was Arthur Berry. I could have been a successful businessman, a baron on Wall Street, and a contributing member to society. But, instead I chose the life of a thief, and spent two thirds of my adult life behind prison bars. I have spent a lifetime robbing myself."

While it has been well said that hindsight is twenty-twenty vision, a quick glance at every thing reflected in the rear-view mirror of life awakens us to the fact that life is quickly getting away from us. Any time we pause to look at life backward, we seem to more readily identify the failures and the regrets. If only we possessed the ability to go back with the knowledge we hold today. In Job 29, Job is recollecting where he has been and what he has faced, and with a heavy heart says, "Oh that I were as in months past...as I was in the days of my youth...when my children were about me." In a similar moment of reflection, David wished he had been a better father after Absalom died. Imagine the remorse Esau felt at the mere scent of food after he sold his birthright for a meal. Imagine how Moses wished he had spoken to the rock rather than striking it once he saw the land of promise. It is both unhealthy and unproductive to try and live life in the past, but a rightly perceived past offers valuable insights and wisdom for life in the present. We have the choice to either make our past a stepping stone to build for the future, or a stumbling block which disables us from dreaming for the future. How is it possible to gain a clearer perspective of where we are going by gleaning from where we have been?

Looking backward, **our overcomings should be less recognizable.** In Philippians 3:13, Paul writes, "...forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before..." This was the words of a man whose past had been filled with blasphemy and murder. However, like a plane rising higher in the air, the farther he moved away from that part of his life, the smaller his past would appear. While his failed past was certainly painful, he refused to permit it to paralyze his ability to keep reaching forward. I like what author James Long wrote, "One reason God created time was so there would be a place to bury the failures of the past." Whether it is walking, riding a bike, or swimming, we rarely get things perfectly right the first time around. However, failure is not always the guarantee of finality. Abraham's childhood was filled with idol worship, but by the end of his life "...he was called the Friend of God." Rahab's past was working as a prostitute in Jericho, but she would go on to become part of the pure lineage of Christ. If we never learn to move on, it is impossible to remain still and create distance from failures at the same time. The great hope we hold is that no story is ever really over until God writes the final chapter!

Looking backward, **our offences should be less remembered.** In Ephesians 4:32, Paul notes we should be "...forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." If that is the standard of our forgiveness, exactly how was it demonstrated? Hezekiah describes the experience in Isaiah 38:17, "...for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." Like a dog with a bone, it should be instinctive in our hearts as Christians that some things simply need to be buried. Henry Ward Beecher said, "Every man should have a fair-sized cemetery in which to bury the faults of his friends." If time does not heal our wounds, we are more apt to bury our friends, or enemies, than to bury their faults. Abner was not the last person to turn the spear around while running in order to pierce his pursuing enemy Asahel. A maturing life will always possess a forgiving heart. How else can the meekness of Moses be explained after enduring forty years of criticism? How else can the patience of Job be explained after losing every treasure in his life? How else can the tenderness of David be explained after Saul continually sought for his life?

They refused to allow the dark clouds of the past to overshadow the pathway of the present. A man who lives short on memory is a man who will live long on grace.

Looking backward, **our opportunities should be less relinquished.** In Ephesians 5:16, Paul writes, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." The word "redeeming" means "to buy up the opportunity," and the word "evil" means "to be pressed with labor, hardship, and annoyances." How easy it is to become so distracted by secondary options that we totally miss taking advantage of the essential opportunities of life. There is a Bulgarian proverb which says, "Seize the opportunity by the beard, for it is bald behind." While no God-sent opportunity should ever escape our grasp, we must also learn to position our life to enable us to catch it! A man growing wise in life no longer feels the need to run after success or fulfillment because in giving up the frantic pursuit, he finds those very blessings catch up with him from behind. Abraham had the hope of the Lord providing a lamb, and out of his obedience, "...behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket." David had the promise of a throne made behind him, but after a time of preparation, the promise caught up with him. Vance Havner said, "He who waits on God loses no time." Although we fear having lost many God-given opportunities, may we ever remember that the God of the opportunity always ensures "objects in mirror are closer than they appear."

Essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." For all of the good and bad we have ever faced in our life, every thing has worked together to shape and mold who and what we are today. However, beware of taking drawn out stares into your rear-view mirror. You may turn around just in time to discover the future has run out, and all you have done is stolen from yourself.

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