

Before the Good Old Days Are Gone

By: David Burruss

“I wish there was a way to know you're in the good old days before you've actually left them.”

There is something painfully familiar about that thought. We often recognize the value of certain days only after they are gone. At the time, they did not seem remarkable. They were simply life, filled with work, responsibilities, meals, conversations, frustrations, and routines. Then something changes. Children grow older. Parents age. Friends move away. Congregations change. Familiar voices disappear from familiar places. Looking back, we sometimes realize that the ordinary days we hurried through were more precious than we knew.

Ecclesiastes speaks honestly about the changing nature of life. Solomon wrote, “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). He goes on to describe experiences that touch every human life: “A time to be born, and a time to die,” and “A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance” (vv. 2, 4).

The passage reminds us that life does not remain as it is. The season we are living in now will eventually give way to another. We know this, yet we often live as though the people, opportunities, and routines surrounding us will always be there. We cannot keep our children small, preserve every friendship exactly as it is, prevent every goodbye, or hold on to every friendship exactly as it is, prevent every goodbye, or hold on to every season we enjoy. What we can do is learn to recognize God's goodness while His gifts are still in our hands.

That is part of the wisdom Solomon draws from the changing seasons of life. He writes, “I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13).

Those final words are important: “it is the gift of God.” Solomon is not describing some extraordinary experience. He speaks of eating, drinking, working, and enjoying the good that God has provided. These are ordinary parts of life, but recognizing them as gifts changes the way we receive them.

James similarly reminds us, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). Some of God's gifts are so familiar that we hardly notice them. A meal around the table, children talking in another room, a conversation with a parent, sitting beside someone we love in worship, having useful work to do, or simply waking up to another morning may not seem especially significant. Yet when one of those things is no longer possible, we suddenly understand how valuable it was.

Perhaps our problem is not that we fail to appreciate yesterday. Most of us eventually learn to do that. The harder lesson is learning to appreciate today.

Moses prayed, “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). Numbering our days does not mean living anxiously, constantly wondering how much time remains. It means understanding that our days are limited and therefore should not be carelessly spent. Wisdom recognizes that opportunities have a season. There is a time when a child wants our attention, a time when a parent is only a phone call away, a time when we have the strength to work, and a time when someone we love is close enough to sit across the table from us. Those opportunities should not be treated as though they are permanent.

There is another side to this that Scripture does not allow us to overlook. Appreciating the past can easily become idealizing the past. Solomon warned, “Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For you do not inquire wisely concerning this” (Ecclesiastes 7:10).

Memory has a way of softening yesterday. The days we now remember fondly had troubles of their own. There were worries, disappointments, disagreements, sleepless nights, and prayers whose answers we could not yet see. Perhaps

the “good old days” were not good because everything was easy. We call them good because enough time has passed for us to recognize blessings we did not fully appreciate while we were living them.

What if we learned to look at today with some of the clarity that usually comes only with hindsight? Someone whose voice we may someday miss can still be called today. Someone whose place at the table will not always be filled may be sitting there now. There are people we can encourage, relationships we can strengthen, acts of kindness we can perform, and words of gratitude we still have time to speak. We do not have to wait for these opportunities to become memories before recognizing their value.

Of course, not every season of life is pleasant. Ecclesiastes makes that clear. There is a time to weep as surely as there is a time to laugh. Some people are living through seasons they will be thankful to leave behind. Biblical gratitude does not require us to pretend that suffering is pleasant. It does teach us to remain attentive to God's goodness even when life is difficult.

The psalmist declared, “This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24). There is wisdom in receiving the day God has actually given us instead of living continually in yesterday or waiting for some better tomorrow. Yesterday contains memories for which we can thank Him. Tomorrow, if God gives it, will bring its own opportunities. Today is the day presently in our hands.

Maybe there is a way to know we are living in the “good old days” before we have left them. It begins by understanding that many of God's richest blessings come wrapped in ordinary moments. One day the rooms may be quieter, the faces around the table may change, and routines we hardly notice now may become treasured memories.

We cannot keep the good old days from passing. But we can thank God for His gifts while they are still in our hands, love the people He has placed around us while we still have the opportunity, and ask Him to teach us to number our days so that we live them wisely.