



DEVELOPING THE FUTURE

Sermon

Part 1 – Thankful for a Future

2015 Thank Offering for the World Evangelism Fund

“Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord.” Psalm 22:30b, NLT

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

⁹ That is what the Scriptures mean when they say,
 “No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
 and no mind has imagined
 what God has prepared
 for those who love him.”

¹⁰ But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets.

Before we look at the future, we need to remember our heritage from the past. One important figure in the history of the Church of the Nazarene is Phineas Bresee. Formerly a Methodist minister, Bresee later became a proponent of the Holiness Movement and organized the first Church of the Nazarene congregation in 1895.

Phineas is dead, and won’t be able to join us here today. He’s a part of our past, in the Church of the Nazarene.

1. The past

The past is great. You can change it. Everybody changes their past by choosing what to remember. Every preacher knows that the best stories mature...they get better with time!

Here’s what the past looks like: a hometown church (project a picture of a hometown church) . . . the kind of church I was raised in, and how I choose to remember it. Notice that I haven’t pictured the narrow seating, sweltering heat, rodents and outhouses. I chose to remember the quaint, happy church that ushered me into the experience of salvation and heart holiness.

The music (project a picture of a relevant album cover). The kind of music I was raised on. I fondly remember listening to the music while the musicians warmed up before the service.

The preaching (project a picture of a preacher). I choose to remember the cutting Saturday night sermon on Hell that left such an impression on me that I can still remember which pew I was sitting on.

God knew that we’d occasionally take a nostalgic educational tour of our past. That’s why He gave us Deuteronomy 6:

¹⁰ When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

I remember my Nazarene past fondly, proudly, but if those who came before us were here, like Phineas, they would have some great stories of God's goodness to share.

2. The present

Even the best visionaries have trouble seeing the present.

During the period of the prophets, the Israelites had this problem: they could see backwards to the Exodus and forward to the Day of the Lord, they just couldn't see their present injustices against the poor, neglect of God and shallowness of worship.

We do the same thing because we live in a fog called the present.

- Every look at a discouraging church budget report—that can make your vision cloudy.
- Have a friend going through painful circumstances? That will cloud up your vision.

The present fog can be so thick that we sometimes miss big things that the Lord is doing. Here are a few examples of what is happening in the Church of the Nazarene through the World Evangelism Fund:

- Huge, sweeping movements of the Holy Spirit in the Horn of Africa
- Homeless shelters for displaced individuals
- God calling eight-year-olds to preach and teach
- College students breaking from the pull of the world in order to be like Jesus
- A bottle of alcohol being poured down the drain in victory over addiction
- Three-quarters of a million decisions for Christ through the JESUS Film/NMI collaboration
- More than 12,000 children supported through child development centers in conjunction with Nazarene Compassionate Ministries

Seeing the present, that's the tough assignment. We spend all of our time in the present, and it's foggy. In 2 Kings, Elisha prayed for his servant, Gehazi, "O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!" (2 Kings 6:17). Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes. Gehazi looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

3. The future

You can't change the future; you create it. Your future is an original!

My grandfather was a horse man. He wasn't at all pleased, in 1947, when my dad brought the first tractor onto the farm. Making adjustments were hard because there were two very distinct visions of the future. One vision involved significant change and the other involved significant maintaining.

Change is always hard, except when it's not. About 40 years after my grandfather and my dad worked through the horse vs. tractor debate, my dad and I had our own differences in vision for the future. We took pride in our fence building. We took great care to ensure that the posts were perpendicular and exactly straight. And, we dug every hole by hand. Into this heritage of fence building, I suggested a new vision of the future which included a tractor mounted auger, a boring tool, to dig fence post holes. The discussion and idea sharing took some time, but once the new digger arrived, my dad and I both adapted to the change almost instantaneously.

I recently found one of my old phones (project a picture or bring an example of an outdated cell phone). It's not going to make it into my future. My kids literally laughed at it!

What are we going to do? Look to the future, listen to God, and give it our very best. One way we can give God our very best is to be generous, both in the present and in the future. Today we're giving you the chance to be generous in giving to the World Evangelism Fund, but you might also be interested in giving through other ways. If you want to plan future giving to this fund or others, the Church of the Nazarene Foundation can help you. They help donors plan giving for both today and tomorrow.

Remember the past, live in the present, and look to the future. It's going to be exciting because, as the Lord told Jeremiah, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the LORD, 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen'" (Jeremiah 29:11-12).

Did you catch that? God will give us a future!