

Transitions are a fact of life. Every one of us will transition through both big and small changes thousands of times during our lifetime. From new jobs, new homes, new relationships, losses, and gains – transitions will happen.

An interesting thing about change is that it inevitably causes us to start looking back. Moving in the direction of the unknown seems to draw our gaze back to the familiar. I imagine this is because we already know we can survive the past. Even the worst of our past is something we have been able to overcome. There is nothing wrong and everything biblical about looking back. However, we need to look back with the right motives. Transitions are such a significant part of our lives that of course God wouldn't leave us to navigate these times without guidance.

To direct our thoughts I want us to consider our spiritual ancestors, the Israelites. This is a story of our spiritual heritage, complete with the mistakes and successes of our forefathers. With this history is also valuable instruction on how God wants us to take on our transitions. One of the most well-known transitions of our history is from slaves in Egypt to free people on the way to the Promised Land. We also were once slaves to sin, and we have been set free. All of us are headed to the Promised Land, and all of us must experience the wilderness that is this earthly life.

Please read:
Exodus 16:1-3
Exodus 17:3

- What was it about Egypt that caused the Israelites to want to go back? (Hint: it wasn't just food.)
- How close are their memories of Egypt to what they actually experienced?

- Which part of their experience in Egypt did they fail to remember?

The Israelites were almost completely in the dark when it came to knowing where God was leading them. They were, understandably, afraid of the unknown. Looking back on Egypt they remembered the things they missed, but they forgot what it was actually like: the slavery, the oppression, the pharaoh who slaughtered all their male infants. How often do we fall into this trap? Coveting a past that, when it was our present, we were not content with. When we are in the limbo of transitions, how easy is it to look back and think that the comfort of our past is better than the unknown future?

Next we find the Israelites on the brink of their promised land. The land flowing with milk and honey. The first report they heard confirmed that this land was all God had said it would be. But following the first account is this:

Numbers 13:31-14:4

- What led the Israelites to want to go back even though they were on the brink of their future?
- Was there a time in your life when you felt that sticking with what was familiar, even if it wasn't satisfactory, seemed like a better option than moving forward into the unknown?

The interesting thing is that even if we try to return to the past, it is *never* the way it was. Holding on to the past keeps us from embracing our future. As someone who spent the better half of my adolescent years reminiscing in nostalgic grief about the loss of things I had in the past, I can tell you with confidence that "Nostalgia" is the name of the idol we make of our past. Nostalgia is more than simply

remembering fondly a time gone by. It is the greedy lust to covet something that we can no longer have.

However, during transitions we will inevitably find ourselves looking back. I believe this was a God-given, natural response to navigating transitions, and it serves a specific purpose. Unfortunately, like with every God-given gift, we have found a way to obstruct His purpose for it. We allow Nostalgia to become our god or we allow the trauma of the past to become our prison guard. But God knew that the past could become a valuable asset to us during transition if we set our focus correctly.

Please Read:

Deuteronomy 6:20-23

Joshua 4:1-7

Numbers 10:10

- In each of the passages, who was it that established these memorial events?
- What was the purpose of establishing these memorials?

I have selected only a few examples. But do a search for "Memorial" or "Remember" in a biblical concordance and you will see verse after verse. Throughout the history of the Israelites God tells them to remember the past. But unlike our nostalgia which causes us to covet a rose-colored view of our past, or the painful reminders of trauma that seem to keep a grip on us, God's way of remembering is to place Him at the center. As we study the history of God's people, our history, we can see that God keeps us moving forward, never back. Along the way He has shown us the purpose of our natural inclination to look back while helping us focus our attention on Him and His faithfulness.

What are some events from your past, positive or negative, that you find yourself trying to return to?

Now, think back on that event and contemplate the ways in which you saw God's hand in that situation.

Constantly recalling certain events, whether good or bad memories, can become a habit that is hard to break. Going forward, when these types of events come to your mind, try to reframe them and remember the ways in which God was involved in your life through them.