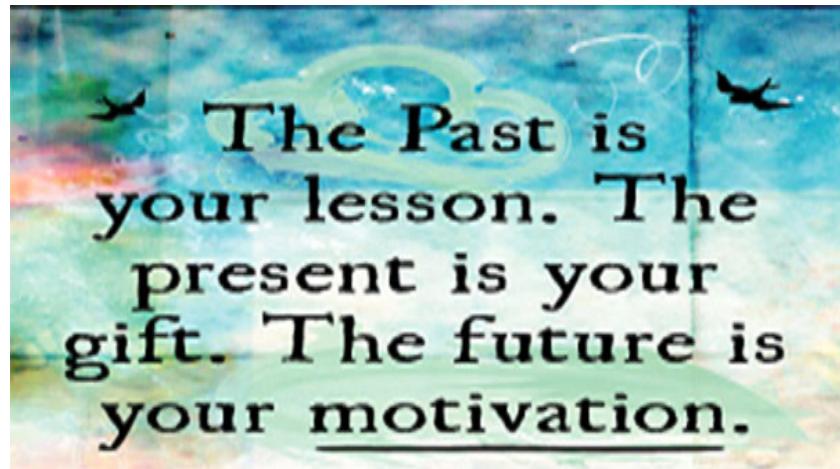


PAST, PRESENT AND THE PROSPECTIVE (FUTURE)

Life is not easy



This has been another tough year for many of us. Losing loved ones, friends, and others who have made a difference in our lives as we "travel through this pilgrim land." Going to the hospitals, to Nursing homes, and to funerals...Life is not easy. Getting older is not fun...but, it could be worse. Some of you have had to experience the worse. Sherry and I have prayed for many loved ones and friends as they are and have experienced those low points all of us have at some time or the other.

When I have things going on in my life that I am concerned about (whether it is health problems, our country, our family going through some unexpected dilemmas, etc.), I try to find something positive to read (Scriptures and encouraging books), or even some funny quotes from individuals we know from television. Steven Wright is a comedian that has some quotes that makes sense only when other things don't make sense. His mind sees things differently than most of us do.

Now...you have to get your thinking cap on as to how Steven Wright's mind twisters twist your thought pattern. Here is what I mean:

- **Borrow money from pessimists -- they don't expect it back.**
- **If you want the rainbow, you got to put up with the rain.**

- **The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.**
- **If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.**
- **When everything is coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.**
- **I intend to live forever... So far, so good.**
- **What happens if you get scared half to death twice?**
- **My mechanic told me, "I couldn't repair your brakes, so I made your horn louder."**
- **To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism; to steal from many is research.**
- **If at first you don't succeed, skydiving is not for you.**
- **If your car could travel at the speed of light, would your headlights work?**

So...you see why I like to read quotes. They have me laughing when I would normally be crying or worrying about something!

Well...I know you are not reading this devotion to just hear of some funny jokes and quotes. You want a more rewarding read; a more uplifting experience coming from the one that has the bully pulpit (so to speak). Thank you for tuning in to the Maranathatoday.com website. Hopefully, this time with you will be uplifting and an encouraging experience; words to dwell on that will help you contend with the pressures of life.

I want you to know that one of the greatest gifts our Lord has given us are friends. I realize that I will never have the opportunity to meet many if not most of the thousands of viewers from over 150 countries who click on our website. One thing I do know about the readers of our website...all of you are either a male or female...whether other people agree with me or not. You tell me, guys; did you know who were girls and who were boys when you were walking down the hall at your high school? There was no doubt about it...it did not take a Biologist to know what a "good looking" girl was versus an "ugly old boy!" The truth has not changed! Eighty years have passed for this writer and I know...girls are girls and boys are boys. Right?? Sherry, my wife, is thinking right now, "Honey, I told you to leave politics out of this devotion and you have already blown it!" And...I say, "That is not politics, that is simply COMMON SENSE."

Now...back to where I was before I was distracted, disgruntled, and

deeply troubled about the state our beloved country is in.

I love my family. They are here whether they like me or not. I see them at reunions, funerals, and hospitals. My daughter, grandchildren, and great grandchildren see me quite often and I love it. I would not want it any other way. BUT...I miss some of my friends of long ago.

Thinking back to "long ago", I miss the hometown newspaper of the 1950s. In my life, it was the Abilene Reporter News (Abilene, Texas) and its sports section (major section with details of what happened in the way of sports); I miss going to the movies with friends (\$.25 cents in your pocket and that was enough for a double feature, Green Hornet serial, a cartoon or two...and a Pepsi Cola, popcorn or peanuts). I miss going to Casey's Drive Inn or "Jumbo Burger," or the Chuck Wagon to have a hamburger and French fries. Unless you were living in Abilene, Texas in the 1950s, you will not identify with the above names of cafes and restaurants; but, you had your favorite food and mood "hangouts" that you treasure now as memories. I loved my friends then... and I love to be with them now. To those friends whom I see quite often when I make my way back to my hometown stomping grounds, "Thanks for the memories, fellow Abilene Eagles."

As we look at our life, we cannot complete our journey without looking at the various stages our lives have gone through or will be going through. We could get into a detailed study of our lives and see where we have made mistakes that ushered us into trouble and see where some of our choices seemed to have settled in our minds as "treasured memories."

All of us go through many stages whereby we either have said, "I don't want to experience that again, or that was an enjoyable experience or journey I would not mind repeating." It can be a family thing, an occupational experience, a business transaction, or something that made sense at the time and either turned out as "a bummer experience" or a "successful, rewarding adventure."

In this session, I want to address the three (3) stages of our lives whereby all of us have to experience before our life on earth is ended and we must stand before God and give an account of those experiences and how we handled them.

These three (3) stages are what I call the "P" stages of life.

1. Past

2. Present

3. Prospective, Predicted or Projected (Future) stages

Prospective is defined as "Likely to be or become something at a later time."

The PAST stage is one that all of us can remember because we have gone over and over our past in our minds...at home, at parties, at get-to-gathers, at the dinner table with our families, sitting on the creek bank with our kids, grandkids, and your sweetheart...and at reunions (family, high-school). You talk about the past; like when you could jump and run, get in trouble for being the class clown, and the football game in which you were instrumental in winning state, district, etc. We tell about how we made money, built our homes, bought that special car, broke our leg, had our children, lost our children, lost our parents, our husband or wife...That is the past. All of us have experienced some of the most rewarding things in our life to talk about and we have experienced some tragedies of which we don't want to reiterate and wade through very often.

I love to hear my friends talk about the football games, the wins, the state championships, the individual challenges, the hard work to get to the state championship...the state track meet. Winning is fun but the losing is something you just can't forget.

Have you found out what I have found out in life...that sometimes it takes a loss to make us better, to make us try harder, to help us instead of hurting us. I have learned that God is as proud of us in the way we handled losses, tragedies, and heartaches (the valley experiences) as He is proud of us when we win in the end (those mountain top experiences). I don't like to go through the valleys, but that is how God equips us to make it to the next level. The past...Yes, we all have those stories to tell our kids, our friends, our group of old people...and we see that the past is a stepping stone to the next stage.

That next stage is the PRESENT. Here we are...old, slower, and not near as good looking as we were when we were young. Incidentally, pictures of me when I was in high-school were not impressive at all. I was skinny and long legged. I was not the young man that was voted "Most Likely to Succeed." Now, we spend a lot of time trying to improve our looks, but it doesn't mean anything. We still are not getting rid of wrinkles; they are multiplying by the day. Most of us have had our hospital stays. Many of

us are having a hard time hearing and seeing. Yep...many of us are definitely not what we use to be. We see the football games and enjoy others getting popped knowing that we couldn't get up if we were hit that hard. We say to our spouse and friends... "Man, I can't believe it is already Sunday." And then they tell you, "It is not Friday, Gerald, it is Tuesday." Then is when I realize that I'm not the only one in that regressive stage of life.

Speaking of not being able to hear as well as we did a few years back, I must tell the joke about the three old men who were out taking a walk one windy day; all of them were hard hearing. The first one said, "Windy, ain't it? The 2nd one said, "No, it is Thursday." The 3rd one said, "I am, too; let's have a coke."

Now that is typical today for many of us. I don't know how many times I say to Sherry, "Now...what did you say?"

At Thanksgiving, Sherry and I were in the grocery store and she asked me where something was. I said I know right where it is and went all the way to the end of the last aisle and she said, "Honey, where are you taking me?" I said, "You said you wanted a box of Tide." She said, "What?? I said I needed to know where the Frozen Pumpkin Pies were?" I swore she said something about some kind of cleanser...but, we just laugh now...and when one of us doesn't hear what the other says, we just repeat "Do you really need a Frozen Pumpkin Pie?" If we didn't laugh at ourselves, we would cry ourselves to sleep.

It is really a positive thing to lose your eyesight a little bit. I got up this morning, had my underwear and tee shirt on, looked in the mirror and thought to myself. "Old man, it is going to take you a lot longer than 30 minutes to fix you up enough to go outside." I hurried and was presentable to the outside world in about 40 minutes.

For the present, I would say, "Make good use of your time. Today is the day God is giving you to enjoy and to be glad we had this time together...(me writing and you reading)." Because of what we have done in the past and what we are experiencing at present, it causes us to take note of TOMORROW.

Decisions in the past and even today will help us to project or have a good prospective of our FUTURE. The past gave us memories to cherish, the present is happening now...and we want to make good use of the

time. With the past experiences and all the good, the bads, and the uglies that have taken place, we can pretty well predict the future.

We know:

1. We can't take it with us...material things are meaningless and useless when we cross the threshold from this life to the next.
2. We can't make up for lost time, but we can build on our knowledge and experience.
3. We have a few years at the most to get ready for our walk through the door of this present life to the next door which holds eternal glory.

This means...if we have prepared for that walk through the door (threshold) to the next, we don't have anything to worry about.

I am a believer that what Jesus said was and is true. "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me will live even though he dies; he that lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26

I love living in the present...with my wife, my daughter, my grandchildren and great grandchildren...and all my friends. However, I long to see Jesus and my oldest daughter, Tami...and other friends and loved ones who have gone on to glory waiting for me.

I can predict my future. I can presume and presuppose that I have a place in heaven waiting for me.

What is heaven like? Jesus said, *"In my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you so. I go to prepare a place for you. And, if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again to receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be also."*

I have prepared and I challenge you to prepare also.

Again...what is heaven like?

"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" the things God has prepared for those who love him—10 these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10

Today, family and friends, we can prepare and make way for our entry into God's glorious Kingdom. I have chosen Jesus to follow. I try my best to follow His instructions in His book. I blow it (fail) sometime, but Jesus knows it. I go to Him and ask for His forgiveness. He forgives me and sets me on the right track until I make another mistake. I truly believe He is "the Way, the Truth and the life...and no one will ever come into God's presence unless it is through Jesus, God's Son.

CHOOSE LIFE, MY FRIEND, CHOOSE LIFE!

Prayer

Father God, may my thoughts given to others be not a hindrance, but be a helpful thought-provoking testimony of where I stand before the Lord. Grant to us a willing heart to listen and be responsive to other's needs. I am excited to know that heaven is on my agenda in the future. I pray that my friends and family will make preparations for what comes next. Keep us healthy and willing to serve others as we stretch toward the mark of the high-calling of God. The race is nearly over. I want my friends and family to know I have appreciated the opportunity to be a witness for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In Jesus' name

Amen

