



Summary of issue:

I seem to always get stuck regretting the past or worrying about the future. Anxiety keeps me prisoner as I find myself either grieving my past or fearing the future. Sometimes I feel like I am “ping-ponging” between the past and the future. Living in the “now” seems nearly impossible.

Making it personal (take turns answering each question):

Do I see myself as struggling with the issue described above?

Do I see my spouse struggling with the issue described above?

If I do struggle in this area, is my tendency to “regret the past” or “fear the future”?

What, if anything, helps me “live in the now”?

Suggestion for improvement:

The Bible often speaks about time, which makes our view of time a spiritual issue. God has a view of time, and Satan has a view of time. As would be expected, these two views are diametrically opposed to one another.

In Philippians 3:13-14 God talks about how we should view both our past and future. The first phrase included here is “forgetting what lies behind”. This does not mean ignoring important things such as offering apologies for past sins or addressing deep trauma that affects life today. The intent here is to stop ruminating on things we can’t change, such as bad decisions we have made and bad things that have happened. The Bible does, however, remind us to remember God’s faithfulness throughout our life. “Living in the past” keeps us from following the second part of this scripture, which is to “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”. In summary, when thinking about our past, avoid ruminating on failures and injustices, but rather remember God’s faithfulness.

A second relevant Biblical message is found in Matthew 6:25-34. In this passage God starts by telling us to not worry about the future. God is in control, He will provide for us, and He cares deeply about us. The example is given of how God provides for birds, with absolutely no worry on their part. As mentioned above, the passage ends by encouraging us to live “in the today”. In Jeremiah 17 God gives advice on how to deal with worry. In this passage, two farmers are described, both planning for the future. One farmer planned, trusted his plan, and he was cursed. The other farmer planned, but then trusted God, and he was blessed. So, Biblical advice about the future is to primarily live in the today, but also plan for the future while avoiding worry. Planning has a chance of helping, but worry has no chance of improving anything.

As may be expected, Satan’s suggestion is just the opposite. Spend no time in the now and constantly live in the past or the future, preferably bouncing between the two. A popular saying is “the best way to predict the future is to look at the past”. Although learning from the past is good, Satan uses this phrase to keep us constantly moving between the past and future, with no chance to observe what God is doing right now.

If you find yourself often regretting the past and worrying about the future, it is important to find a way to stop this pattern and return to living in the now. It is almost impossible to come up with a plan when stuck in this cycle.

Homework:

The homework here is to come up with three activities to do when ruminating on the past and/or worrying about the future. Make these items something you enjoy doing, and choose at least one activity that can be done at any location at any time. The key is to distract yourself into the present. Don't assume these items need to be "spiritual". Assuming you are already in God's word on a daily basis and in prayer continually, feel free to pick any activities you enjoy. Here is the author's distraction list: (1) get outside with the dog; (2) make an ornate hot fudge sundae; (3) watch an episode of COPS. These are not "spiritual", but the author enjoys each item, and when doing these activities his mind is fully distracted from the cycle of regretting the past and/or worrying about the future.

One very useful technique is to talk about items in your immediate environment that you enjoy. Find several things and mentally or out loud tell God what you appreciate about what you are observing. In addition to "things" take time to notice the beauty of nature as well as pleasant weather. The author used this technique once with a woman having a panic attack on an airplane, thereby preventing the flight from turning around.

Memorize your distraction list so it is readily available during times of distress.

Follow up (discuss at next marriage mentor session):

What are the three activities you came up with?

Which is the activity that you can do at anytime anywhere?

Have you tried one or more of these distraction techniques since our last session? Was it helpful?