

Past, Present, and Future

We all share something in common: each one of us has a past, a present, and a future. The Bible helps us deal with all three.

The Past

Some look at the past and see only failures and regrets. While we remember the past, living in yesterday's mistakes or success isn't the best approach to life. Paul provides needed guidance: *"...one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:13–14). When the past presses upon you, remember this: God's forgiveness is real. Let the mistakes go. Past success is good, but we can't rest on the laurels of the past either.

The Future

Many people make the mistake of assuming they know what lies ahead, or that they control what tomorrow will bring. Scripture tells us plainly, *"whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow..."* (James 4:14). God has revealed some details about eternity, but He has not revealed the details of tomorrow. How do we deal with the unknown future? While we do not know what the future holds, we know the One who holds the future. Trust Him!

The Present

Because we cannot change yesterday and cannot control tomorrow, we can't afford to waste today. Hebrews 3 uses the word *"today"* repeatedly to remind us of the urgency of listening and obeying God now (Hebrews 3:7, 15). One verse especially stands out: *"Exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."* (Hebrews 3:13). This day is a gift. It is our opportunity to do what needs to be done: so, whether that means to serve, repent, encourage, worship, or grow, do it!

Don't live chained to the past. Don't be paralyzed by the future. Make the most of today and walk with God in every step.

- by Josh McCord

Cookstove Apostasy

The early church prayed in the upper room, the twentieth century church cooks in the supper room. Today, the supper room has taken place of the upper room, play has taken the place of prayer, and feasting the place of fasting. There are more full stomachs than there are bended knees and broken hearts. There is more fire in the range in the kitchen than there is in the pulpit. When you build a fire in the church kitchen, it often puts out the fire in the pulpit. Ice cream chills the fever of spiritual life.

The early Christians were not cooking in the supper room the day the Holy Spirit came, they were praying in the upper room, they were not waiting on tables, they were waiting on God, they were not waiting for the fire from the stove, but for the fire from above. They were detained by the command of God and not entertained by the cunning of men. They were filled with the Holy Ghost, not stuffed with stew and roast.

Oh, I would like the cooking squad put out and the praying band let in, less ham and sham, and more heaven, less pie and more piety, less use for the cook book, and more for the Old Book. Put out the fire in the kitchen and build up the fire in the pulpit.

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Forgiveness and Grace

It is a wonderful thing to notice how the Bible describes God. He is not hateful or mean-

spirited. He is not eager to punish. Over and over we are told that He is gracious, merciful, and — as the Psalmist put it — “**ready to forgive**” (Psalm 86:5). God wants sinners to return. He stands willing to pardon. That is His very character.

But we must also be honest about the clear teaching of Scripture: **God’s forgiveness is conditional**. It is *always* based on repentance. Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Peter commanded those on Pentecost to “**repent... for the remission of sins**” (Acts 2:38). When Simon the sorcerer sinned, he was told, “**Repent... and pray God**” (Acts 8:22). There is simply no such thing as God forgiving an unrepentant sinner. He is ready to forgive — but He forgives *when* repentance occurs.

This point is essential because some today try to blur the line. They insist we must forgive people whether they repent or not. But Jesus settled this plainly. He said, “If thy brother trespass against thee, **rebuke him**; and **if he repent, forgive him**” (Luke 17:3). Notice that word *if*. Jesus put a condition on forgiveness, and we have no authority to remove it.

However, this does not mean we are free to harbor bitterness or hold a grudge. Far from it. Like God, we must be gracious — generous in heart and ready to forgive. We must want reconciliation. We must hope for repentance. We must stand prepared to extend forgiveness immediately when the sinner turns. The father of the prodigal son illustrates this perfectly. He did not forgive the boy while he was still in the far country, living in rebellion. But the instant that son returned in repentance, the father ran to him, embraced him, and restored him (Luke 15:20–24). That is what it means to be *ready* to forgive.

So the lesson is clear:

- **Forgiveness requires repentance.** We cannot forgive where God Himself has not forgiven.
- **Grace requires readiness.** Our hearts must be open, willing, eager for restoration the moment repentance appears.

May we hold firmly to both truths. Doing so keeps us aligned with God’s own example — upholding His conditions while maintaining His gracious spirit.

- by Greg Gwin