

BACKWARD THINKING, PART 1

Do not say, “Why is it that the former days were better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this. (Ecclesiastes 7:10, NASB)

WHAT EXACTLY IS YOUR FAVORITE GOLF MEMORY? It may have something to do with the way you played a round (good or bad!), where you played it, when it was played, or who was with you. All of these things contribute to the way we enjoy the game and the way we remember it.

Personally, I think—because I have remembered it for so long already—that I will always remember a particularly exciting finish to a round while I was playing with my college teammates on our home course in Redlands, California. Through 12 holes, I was playing quite poorly. Then I sent my drive at the thirteenth into a big tree on the right side of the fairway, leaving me to play a 2-iron (remember those?). From there, things went crazy. I knocked the ball to 10 feet and made birdie. On the next hole, a par-5, I hit my second shot within three feet. Eagle. At the fifteenth, a par-3 demanding a mid-iron, my tee shot stopped an inch from the hole. Birdie. Three holes later, I had snatched another shot from par. I’d played those last six holes five under par. These were the days of the Rocky films, and I remember taking a shower in my dorm that night with “Eye of the Tiger” blaring from the radio. Now that’s a memory!

When I go to the golf course today, though, I’ve found that I’m not allowed to redeem that memory. I can’t say to my playing partners, after I’ve started with a rough 12 holes, “You know, I’m just going to count these next six holes at five-under.” Well, I could say it, but they’d laugh at me!

Today, we begin a new series on the topic of nostalgia, that sort of Hallmark film for the mind, where we replay mental videos of the past in an attempt to make our present better. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes—all of these, and maybe touch, too, cause an emotional swell in us until we get to thinking, *It would be so much better to go back to those days.*

Here’s the trouble: God’s kingdom is advancing. Where we’re stuck in the mud, he’s moving into new places and new hearts. And he wants us to go with him.

In the weeks ahead, we will find that there are cases where it is acceptable (and trust-building) to look back on the work of God, but in general we’ll agree with Solomon: it’s not wise to trade what God is doing *now* for what we enjoyed *then*.

Opening questions Are you the kind of person who enjoys holding on to fond memories? How can memories help us? How can they be a hindrance to moving forward?

READING Ecclesiastes 7:10; Exodus 16:1-32

Memories and wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7)

Why do you think Solomon called it unwise to look back longingly on former days?

Grumbling and distrust (Exodus 16)

What was the mood of the people in the opening verses of this chapter? How did it show up in their words? What had they forgotten about their former life?

As the chapter progresses, how do we see that the Israelites had much to learn about trusting God? How are grumbling and distrust associated with one another? What is a better spirit and course of action (see also Philippians 2:14-16)?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2015 Links Players International. A 5-minute video accompanies today’s study at <https://youtu.be/m1qaD9yiMfA>