

THE LOOMING FUTURE

It's January, and the future is looming. The future looms in January like no other time of the year except maybe graduation season, and perhaps the fall. Actually, the future mostly just looms all the time. But in January, we're pulling shrink-wrap off a fresh set of 365 days. There will be birthdays, engagements, marriages, births, graduations, deaths, holidays, and so on; 365 days of moments and changes tagged with "2017." At the end of those days, life will be different, and we will be, too.

That said, this isn't a dew-eyed soliloquy about the best days of your life, and the glories-to-come. It's just that I know how much the future loomed, threatened, overhung, and made itself a nuisance when I was a teen. And I look back, and think of the extent to which I changed, and my little world of the everyday changed with each passing year (with no mention to the endless, epochal upheaval that has been happening non-stop in the world at large) and I know that change and the future deserve some thought.

So here are some of my thoughts about facing the future. As usual, they aren't without exception, or comprehensive.

1. Don't Panic.

You're probably familiar with this message: many of the decisions you make, things you experience, and habits you form as a teenager lay the foundation for the rest of your life. In consequence of which, the decisions you make, experiences you choose, and habits you form as a teenager are terribly, terribly important.

That's mostly true. At least in my experience and observation. Also scripture seems to support that idea, or one similar to it: "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

What's not true is that those decisions, habits and experiences lock you in, irreversibly. Like pretty much any structure, you can go back in and change stuff in the foundation of your life later on. It's trickier and more expensive, but it can definitely be done, and you'll almost certainly do some of it. And there are some things you won't be able to change, but that God can redeem. So don't panic.

2. Learn to bat the curve.

Life is full of unexpected curves in the road, and curves over

the plate. Don't panic. It's good to make plans, and to have hopes and goals. But in the inevitable event of unanticipated changes, learn to follow God and trust that he knows the hopes you treasure, loves you, and knows best. Plot twists, opportunities and obstacles that shocked me speechless at the time have become unbelievable blessings in my life. As Proverbs 16:9 says "The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps."

3. Do stuff.

It's good to have a plan, even if you know that it'll change as you adapt to change. But If you don't have a plan, it can be pretty common to think of your life as a car stopped at an intersection, waiting for directions.

This is an exceedingly unhelpful analogy. It is much more accurate to think of your life as a vehicle which is hurtling toward an intersection at 1,040 miles per hour; it's going someplace. It's terrifying to think of making a mistake at the speed with which life passes, but pausing in

place is also making a decision. Move in a direction, and trust God to correct your course if it's the wrong one.

4. Enjoy now.

Along with not panicking, learning to bat the curve, and doing stuff, remember to enjoy where you are in life, now. You're just as alive, and just as useful to Jesus' kingdom now as you will be in ten years. Enjoying the blessing of youth, and serving God with the advantages of youth are both scriptural principles (Ecclesiastes 11:9 and 12:1 and both books of Timothy bear this out).

5. Continue to not panic, and pay attention.

As you go through these seasons of change, the future will continue to loom, and loom ominously. It's just what the future does. So as you go through the seasons of change, keep track of how God is faithful through the things you planned and the things you didn't. God is good. God knows you better than you, or any of the people who make helpful suggestions about what you should do with your life do. Even when you look back and think about where God has led you thus far, and where that path is pointing now—don't panic. He knows. Whether you're busy doing nothing, or already worried that you've laid the wrong foundation, trust that a future of following Jesus is a bright one.

