

"What is one thing in the future that you're super excited about?"

Answer:

Answer:

"What is one thing in the future that you're anxious about?"

WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT



You've probably had things happen in your life that really hurt. Everyone does. Maybe you were called a name, maybe someone who you thought was your friend turned out to actually be pretty mean, or maybe you thought your family was doing well and then it broke apart. And while it hurt to go through those experiences, it can hurt to even think of those times, can't it?

Joseph went through some tough experiences as well. His story is one full of despair and disappointment. But if we look at his whole story, we can see what it can look like to focus on the future that God promises, rather than difficult things in our past or present that can pull our attention away from God.

The story so far: Joseph's 10 older brothers had sold him into slavery and he was living in a foreign country, far from his friends, his family, and familiar way of life. And although he had risen in rank to serve Pharaoh, the highest official in the land, Joseph was still a slave. He probably thought about his family every day, fighting the temptation to feel bitter about what his brothers did to him. To make things worse, Joseph had been wrongfully accused of taking advantage of his place in Pharaoh's house and was sent to the dungeons to rot. Then one day, Pharaoh had an unsettling dream. Ugly, zombie-like cows were eating healthy cows and piles of moldy, rotten wheat were devouring healthy stacks of wheat—the stuff of nightmares. Joseph had a choice: he could have focused on what had happened to him in the past, and stuck it to Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, or he could choose to rely on God and look forward, caring for his captors and their future.

Think about what you might have done if you were in Joseph's situation. Would you have sat in the dungeon and focused on the hurts you experienced in the past? Or would you have trusted in the future that God had for you? One of the marks of a disciple is that no matter what happened in the past or what is happening in the present, a Christ-follower is able to look forward.

Read Genesis 41:15-57 and answer the following questions.

What was Joseph's response when Pharaoh asked of him if he was able to interpret dreams?

How would you describe Joseph's attitude when he presented the plan for Egypt's future? Selfish? Bitter? Or prepared?

How does your attitude, past, or bitterness keep you from looking forward?

How can looking back keep you from focusing on God's plan?

A SECOND LOOK



Have you ever been the navigator on a car trip? Whether you use a big foldout road map or a Maps app on a smartphone, you have to keep your eyes on what is coming ahead. It wouldn't make any sense to only look at the road you've already driven down. In fact, the app won't even highlight the road you've already traveled, just the route you have yet to travel.

It's the same on our journey with Christ. The road we've already traveled gives us valuable experience, wisdom, and spiritual endurance, but it would be dangerous to only look behind us. Like the app on our phones, the road in front of us is highlighted for a reason. The Apostle Paul says it best when he says: "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13b-14).

Looking forward doesn't mean that we should treat our past experiences like they never happened or like they were a waste of our time. Both good and bad, these experiences are an important part of our lives. But, we should see them as things the Lord will use to make us into mature disciples and kingdom leaders—people who can look to the future with courage rather than despair.

Don't feel like you have to do this on your own. If you have things in your life that you can't help but feel bitterness for, talk to a leader in your life about how you can process these experiences well. Talk to God and ask him for strength to forgive. God has brought you to where you are now and he will never abandon you, even if you feel like Joseph—in a deep, dark dungeon. Mature disciples look forward with clear eyes, focused on God's plan, with his strength and courage flowing through their veins.

Answer:

Describe a time in the past when God led you through a particularly difficult situation.

When can looking at the past help you rely on God and focus on his future plan?

When can looking at the past hurt your ability to rely on God and focus on his future plan?

How can focusing on the past affect the people around you?

APPLY IT



What can you do this week to forgive what is behind you and look forward to what God promises?

Be specific:

What are you going to do?

When are you going to do it?

Is there someone who can keep you accountable?

THINK ABOUT IT

"Forgiveness allows you to focus on the future without combatting the past." – unknown

MEMORIZE/MEDITATE ON THIS VERSE

But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:13b-14 (ESV)