

CREATIVE PASTORING | *Past, Future, Present*

Let's think for a moment about how our brains experience time.

We normally *think* of time as linear – “***past... present... future...***” But the way we actually *experience* time is more like: “***past... future... present...***”

Because however we understand the past, is how we tend to expect the future. And however we expect the future, determines how we live in the present.

Brain scientists describe this in terms of two different neural networks.

The first is what's called the ***narrative network***, and this is where our brains spend the majority of their time. This is where we think or tell ourselves stories about something that happened in the past or something that's going to happen in the future. It's actually quite tiring, as our brains are known for producing worry and concern in this network.

The other network is called the ***direct experience network***. Most of us struggle to live here very often, but this is where we find ourselves attentive only to the present moment and situation. And this network is known for making us less worried, less afraid, more relaxed, and more pliable as human beings.

So the question is: what if we could go from “***past, future, present***” to “***past, present, future?***”

There's a story in the earliest chapters of the Bible about a slave girl who becomes a mistress, named Hagar. Due to a messy love triangle, Hagar finds herself in a desperate and dangerous situation that causes her to run away to the wilderness.

She finds herself on the bank of a river, not sure where to turn next, terrified of where she's come from and absolutely lost as to where she's going. When all of a sudden, a blinding light breaks through the darkness and she encounters the voice of God asking her two simple questions:

“Where have you come from, and where are you going?”

(Genesis 16:8)

Those are powerful questions we all must face if we're going to learn to be *present* to the *presence* of God in every moment of our lives – especially those that may cause fear.

As Hagar explains that she is running away from her past, God redefines her future in a way that opens her eyes to the present reality – the reality that God sees her; the reality that God has got her; the reality that God is holding both her past and her future such that she doesn't have to be afraid in the present.

We often worry about what we could've or should've done, or what we wish hadn't been done to us. We are anxious about what we could or should do next, or what might happen outside our control. And we miss the moment in front of us, and God's voice in it.

I'm going to invite you to experiment with the practice of a simple prayer to help you be present to the God who is present to you. It's a one-word prayer, simply saying, "**Here**" – as in: "*Here God – you take all this stuff, both past and future;*" and "*Here God – I'm here in this moment to be with you.*" To know you. To hear from you. To see you. To know that I'm okay with you.

I invite you to open your hands in front of you right now, and close your eyes to help focus.

I invite you to bring to mind something from your recent past, that is causing worry about the future. What happened in the past days or weeks to create tension, to cause worry, fear, unsettledness, or concern? Bring it to mind, and then simply pray the prayer, "**Here,**" in your mind and your heart, as many times as you need to, to hand it over to God.

[Allow some time for personal prayer]

Now think for a moment about how this past experience has affected your expectations of the future. What have you become afraid of, for the next interaction or conversation? What makes you worried about how your past experience at home, at work, or at school, will affect your acceptance in the future? What makes your mind race about this afternoon, tomorrow morning, or next week? Bring this to mind, and then simply pray the prayer, "**Here,**" in your mind and your heart, as many times as you need to, to hand it over to God.

[Allow some time for quiet personal prayer]

Now I invite you just to be "*here,*" and to say, "*here,*" and to pray, "*here*" so that you can *present* your life to God in order to be *present* with God right here.

[Allow some time for quiet personal prayer]

[This reflection is best followed up with the song "Here's My Heart Lord" by Lauren Daigle
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTDODA-1IsE>]