

Looking back to look forward
January 1, 2023

Today is the perfect day to look back to look forward.

Picture this; you are about to **pull out of a parallel parking** spot into the flow of the traffic. You look in the rear view mirror before you hit the gas to move into the rest of your day. **You can't stay there**, you've got things to do. You have plans. **Nothing happens unless you turn your gaze forward and then pull out into what is ahead of you.**

We are here on a Sunday that is New Year's day. This has **happened twice** since I've been at Eagle Ridge Church of God. **This is the perfect time** to look back to look forward. We just finished up 2022 with celebrating Christ's birth and now it's the teeth of winter 2023.

In a way, it's like a new years resolution, but it's not totally dependent upon will power. It's something like singing "Auld Lang Syne" after the ball drops. **We say goodbye to the last year**, whether it was good or bad, and then **celebrate the possibility** of this just born, baby year.

Let's start with what can happen when you look into the rear view mirror. It's a mixed bag and can be **misinterpreted or misrepresented.** This is what we do without the Holy Spirit.

Looking back can be negative when...

- Nostalgia clouds reality.

Nostalgia is, "the sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically a period or place with happy personal association.

This is where we **misremember.** We look back and mostly **remember the good things.** Nostalgia is **never reality** because nothing is all-good. **This does not prepare us to hit the gas** and move into the future. **You might miss that truck rolling down the road.**

Looking back can be negative when...Regret freezes.

A mistake that you allow the enemy to keep reminding you of, that is how we get frozen.

We've wrecked before so we just can't seem to hit the gas. There might be another car pulling out, **better wait**. There was pain in the past so there is probably pain in the future.

Looking back can be negative when...Bitterness poisons.

Bitterness and anger demand a lot of energy that is not generating any forward movement. No one makes **good decisions** about moving into the future when they are bitter and angry. Never drive angry and stay clear of angry drivers.

That's the warning about looking in the rear view mirror.

These are ways we look back, but **don't really get anything to help us move forward in a healthy way**. Now here's how it can work for good for disciples of Jesus. Looking back can be positive when...We see God's hand more objectively.

Looking back in the rear view mirror should be to **see what God has been doing** in our lives. **It demands remembering and honesty**. We must avoid nostalgia, regret, and bitterness. **Those won't help us see the ways that God is orchestrating** things in our lives and moving us toward what he wants for us and for those around us. **This is when we ask God to help us see the past accurately**.

Have you ever been with someone who is telling you about past events that you shared and you know, that you know it never happened that way? **That person's wounds cause them to create a past that they can live with**.

The problem is, we don't want to live with it, we want to see what God has been doing in order to be able to see what he continues to do.

Looking back can be positive when...Allowing it to correct, instruct and inspire.

I realize that these three words could be **sermons unto themselves**. Are there things in the rear view mirror that, when you look at them, **they demand that you change because you were wrong?**

Don't pull out before being corrected or you might just repeat what you did before. "No need to signal, it looks clear to me." That needs to be corrected.

You must not only receive correction, but also be taught to **signal, check your mirror,** and then your **blind spot**. You let **God teach you** through your past experiences.

And, of course, we need to be **inspired by God that we can and should move forward in his blessing.**

Before we get off track, let's look at God's word. **Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him! ⁹ Fear the LORD, you his godly people, for those who fear him will have all they need. Psalm 34:8-9**

I don't need to be afraid of pulling out; my refuge is God not in staying where I think I'm safe.

Ultimately, looking back to **see God's hand moving is to remember that you have tasted and have seen that God is good,** no matter the good and the bad of what is in the mirror.

Pause...

Remember when you took refuge in the truth? You accepted that he is good and that he has chosen you. Knowing that you are **one in whom Christ dwells** and that you live in his unshakable kingdom is **joy.**

When I see that **he is not only good and powerful** enough to always do what he puts his hand to do. That is what fear means. It's that "wow," **how can you be so good** to me since I am such a mess?

But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do. Psalm 73:28

When we taste and see that he is good and we remember that we must take that with us as we move forward. **It then means that the only natural thing to do is to tell others of the goodness we have tasted and seen.**

You will always tell people about a good place to eat that you have experienced yourself. **It's different from looking it up on google** and reading that person's good rating and comments.

This is vital for God's people. This is why we start each Bridge Group with the question, **"God, how can you be so good?"** We share with one another what we have tasted and seen of God's goodness. **I cannot navigate the future without doing this with other people trying to do the same.**

You are thinking of something right now. Remember it. Share it. That will help you move into your future.

Now I want to help you **transition from you to us.** How has God been good to Eagle Ridge, not just you specifically?

Here's what God has done in 2022.

- Financially stable.
- Seen people follow Jesus in **baptism**, our first from Cultivate, **Amanda.**
- **Youth ministry** is growing.
- **More children** are returning.
- Cultivate is **multiplying from Midland Mall**, to downtown Sanford, to Eureka Springs, Arkansas.
- People have been **drawn to this fellowship** because they want to reach out and make disciples.
- **Pastor Julie** has completed TBP cohort, is now applying that to Uganda and TAPP
- **Josie Pizzi** has blessed Hope Church of God for the past year as a preaching/teaching pastor and continues to mentor the **house church in Italy.**

- **Our staff** has never been more unified and effective.
- **Elders** have been a great sounding board and encouragement to me.

Is there anything I'm missing? Shout it out. "Bill's beard!"

These are signs of the kingdom! These are an answer to the prayer Jesus taught us to pray. **May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10**

The kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven is the restoration of God's loving rule over all things. This is happening right now and will lead toward eternity. The Kingdom of God is a **present reality and a future hope.**

Now let's look forward to 2023 and beyond. But like looking to the past, it can be a mixed bag. **Here's how we can mess it up** when we gaze out toward the horizon and hit the gas.

Looking forward can be negative when...Trying to predict Jesus' return.

This is something that is potentially so destructive. It is the basis of some pretty awful and ill-informed political strategies. **There is nothing that Jesus said or did that leads me to believe that we should expend energy trying to predict something that Jesus himself didn't even know.**

Remember Y2K? That's a great example. There are plenty of **false prophets** telling you that some group of nations are going to come together, and one nation will attack another, and then the antiChrist will come and America is God's only hope.

I remember false prophets telling us that this would happen when the **USSR was to attack Israel.** It didn't happen. These people take a **very few very confusing verses from literature filled with symbolic language and create a map for how the world will end.**

The New Testament says, **be ready** for the second advent. It didn't say to **get creative with the book of Revelations and crack the code** to find out how and when the end will come.

Don't waste your time and energy.

Looking forward can be negative when...**I can't be present.**

Ever had that friend that **you couldn't nail down for any plans** because they always wanted to keep their options open just encase something better came along. These are the people who are always **looking over your shoulder** for the next thing, while talking to you.

I'm a thinker, a daydreamer. I can easily be on another planet and miss something right in front of me. **Being present with others is powerful, but if we are always gazing off toward that next horizon, then we will miss something that God is doing right now.**

Looking forward can be negative when...**It is all about my dreams.**

We talk a lot about having a dream and going after it. The problem with this is **it's not usually about anyone except for me.** Oh, **others will be blessed** when I am blessed, but it's really about me.

This brings us back to **viewing the future as my story, starring me,** with Jesus in a supporting role. **When looking forward to it, we should be trying to see Jesus' story, starring Jesus,** where I get a supporting role.

Here's how looking into the future should be.

Looking forward is positive when...Scripture is our guide starting with what Jesus said and did.

Did you notice where the center is? The center is Jesus, what he said and did. **How Jesus operated and what he said as valuable is just as anointed** as his words in the Sermon on the Mount.

The rest of the Bible must be seen through the lens of Jesus. The teaching in the Old Testament and the stories are **not stand-alone.** They are to be seen through Jesus. **This is a different covenant.** This was a covenant between God and a particular nation to be his people and to show other people who to know and be in relationship with God. **It was out of Israel that the messiah came.**

The new covenant is through faith in Jesus. It is a multinational, multi-ethnic group of people who have put their trust in Jesus. God takes up residence in them, not in a nation or a building of any kind.

Looking forward is positive when...**I'm looking for signs of the Kingdom.**

I'm actively looking for the signs of this restoration that God is doing through Jesus. What is being put right or being made new. Whenever we see this happening, it is a sign of how things are in heaven happening on earth.

If you don't do this, it is impossible to remain as one who believes that God is good. You will start to notice what is wrong. More importantly, you will not be able to resist the building of your own little pitiful kingdom.

Looking forward is positive when...**It is about others.**

Jesus came to serve and not be served and give his life as a ransom for many; therefore, we must put our focus as much as possible on others. Our flesh pulls against this, so there is no need to feel guilt when we are selfish, but rather to say with a grin, "There I go again making it about me."

This is why we ask this question at the beginning of our Bridge Group meetings, "How am I doing loving those around me." Another way to ask this one is, "What does love look like today?"

When looking into the future, here's how God's word directs us.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6

³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. ³⁴ "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today. Matthew 6:32-34

We believe that God has called us to swim against the tide of the American Church, doing it the American way instead of the Jesus' way. Looking into our past, we see that we tried to be like other churches that attract as many people as possible to our services and programs. We believe that God has called us to be a church that makes disciples who can replicate. We are to "teach them to obey" everything Jesus has taught.

To continue to be a church of disciples who make disciples to the 3rd and 4th generation, we have to remember this key verse that describes the Jesus way of multiplication.

Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. ² You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others. 2 Timothy 2:1-2

Here's what I see when I look from the rear view mirror and through the front window.

I believe that these are based upon scripture, a belief in his kingdom expanding and a focus on those who God loves who are broken and separated from him by sin.

Here's where we look to the future for us, not just me.

Seeing more people coming out of the shadows and into a bridge group and more bridge group leaders coming out of those groups. What if we had a bridge group at the workplace for people who can't get here on Sunday?

Starting 3rd and 4th generation Builder Cohorts.

Partnering with Greg Weins of Healthy Growing Churches in Orlando to create a resource to help leaders.

Helping Meridian Church become a disciple making church through leaders.

A new Cohort for **The Bonheoffer Project**.

Warner Camp Capital campaign.

Cultivate opening soon in Sanford and, hopefully, in Arkansas.
Starting a **Pickleball** drop in night in order to meet people and develop relationships that God can use.

That's a lot of **metaphors and theories** about the past and the future. How about something **less touchy feely** and more concrete?

How can I **build on** what God has done and **join** what He is doing?

1. **Come home**

If you've been away, maybe since covid, you just got out of the habit of being with God's people. It's time. These **people need you and you need these people**. Don't join a gym, the senior center, return to the body of Christ. **Your presence matters and the presence of other Christ followers in your life matters.**

2. **Join a Bridge Group**

Groups are restarting again. You need a relational context.

3. **Learn how God has shaped you to serve others**

Meet with Tammy , our **director of mobilization**.

4. **Start experimenting by serving**

Start serving as an experiment; try some things out to see how they fit. Talk to Deb about jumping into what is happening at **Cultivate**. We have opportunities in worship, tech, greeting, youth, children...