

Looking forward

Anticipation is in our nature, and our Maker wants it that way

World Magazine

Post Date: November 21, 2019 - Issue Date: December 07, 2019



My father and I have a steady date at the diner on Saturday mornings. One thing I have observed from our booth week after week is that people always look happy when they walk into a restaurant, whereas they look just regular when walking out. I am sure it is the same with me.

The reason is not hard to guess. It is the power of anticipation, in this case, of the enjoyment of the visualized meal and the ceremony of being served by an affable waitress and of conversation with a person whose company one likes.

Built into human nature is a need to have something to look forward to. If we don't always realize the truth of that proposition, is it not a testimony to the

consistency of blessings from God that daily satisfy the need before it has a chance to rear its head?

Our Creator, in His very particular knowledge of our frame, has even thought to arrange these vivifying anticipations in a series of concentric circles, from the banality of three meals a day to alleviate the tedium of work (you wouldn't think it banal if you had to go without), to the seven-day rhythm of the Sabbath rest, to the longer-term anticipation of a child returning home from college on Christmas break, to the long-long-term anticipation of bouncing a grandchild on your knee.

We are hard-wired for goals, and the absence of them mitigates shalom.

I have worked in several factories and textile mills, and I can vouch for the fact that the dominant topic in those places is the 15-minute break and lunch break. "When's my break?" "Did you go on break?" "Twenty more minutes till break!" "Hey, I didn't get my break!" "Can't help you now, I'm going on break."

A young man I know always seems to have a trip he's looking forward to. Last year it was Iceland, Scotland, the Dominican Republic, and skiing in Colorado. It is obvious to me that he lives for these travels, and that he needs them like a drug to make his life, without a Christian focus, bearable between them.

I have learned a thing or two about the secret of aging well. I know two elderly men, one of whom wakes up in the morning excited about his plans for the day, and the other who has no interests. The former is thriving while the latter is not. We are hard-wired for goals, and the absence of them mitigates shalom.

Even my cat, by all evidence, is imbued with some rudimentary anticipatory apparatus. She knows she gets her canned food treat only in the morning—not a bite in afternoon or evening!—and brays pathetically at my bedroom door when day arrives. Can an animal really lie in its basket in the wee hours and visualize the dollop of pâté-colored mixed-meat products coming to her little bowl? It would appear so.

But for humans it is undisputable. Marriage counselors will tell you how important it is for spouses to go out on dates, ideally once a week. Nothing to look forward to on the weekend may make for a grumpy Mommy on the weekdays. And I feel certain that the poorest woman in the poorest hut in deepest, darkest Africa has contrived some little mental game to make her daily drudgery fly by: perhaps a secret garden of her favorite flowers that she goes to after work.

It is the Master who has made us all this way. He has no interest in us changing this peculiarity about us. He only wishes that anticipation would be fixed on things above, not things below that pass away. Anna and Simeon, by all outward appearances, had nothing going for them. But they ventured daily to the Temple in anticipation of Messiah's coming, and were not disappointed.

What about us? "Christ...will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:28). Say with me this Christmas, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning" (Psalm 130:5-6).

Andrée Seu Peterson