

Appreciate the Now

J. LeBron McBride, PhD

Worries about the past or future can sap your joy and productivity in the present.

One of my favorite quotations, often attributed to Mark Twain, says, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened." This quote reminds us that we are often needlessly anxious. We chew on anxieties from the past, we ingest anxieties from the future, and then we wonder why we feel emotionally malnourished.

Where do you make your home? Do you tend to live in the past? Do you have a hard time letting go of past failures, regrets, hurts, and mistakes? While it is OK to reflect on and recall good things from your past, even then it is not a good idea to reside there.

On the other hand, do you tend to live in the future, worrying about the awful things that *could* happen? Do you find yourself focusing on the next phase in life and how you will be happy once you arrive there? Be careful, or you will never reach a destination of contentment. The future can wreck our lives if we anticipate it too much or think of all that could go wrong. Don't take all the troubles of tomorrow and dump them into today.

The past and the future should add good thoughts to



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our lives — memories about what we have done and hopes for what we will do. They should not be the primary sustenance for our thinking, though. Obsessing about the past or the future can be destructive, causing us to miss out on precious moments in the present.

Life's moments can pass us like stars shooting across the sky while we sleep. We often do not even notice or appreciate them. This is human, of course, and we should not beat ourselves up over this. However, from time to time, we should pause and reflect on how we could focus on life in a way that squeezes every ounce of goodness and meaning and refreshment out of the present moment.

What would happen if you lived in the now?

What if you were truly present with each patient you see instead of being distracted by other things on your schedule?

What if

you were

focused on

your spouse

or partner

instead of

making

plans in

your head

while he or

she is talking? What if you were really tuned into your children and their unique needs for today? What if your friends knew that you would hear what they were saying and give them your full attention for the moment? What if you appreciated today and all that is yours right now?

The truth is we will not have this moment for very long. *Now* is the time to slow down, to enjoy family and friends, to appreciate our life's work, to find meaning and purpose in life, to make positive decisions, and to start anew. The present is truly a gift given to us but for a moment. We cannot save it until tomorrow. It is for today and only today. The challenge to us is this: Appreciate the now. It could just make a difference in our lives. **FPM**

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