

Coming Attraction

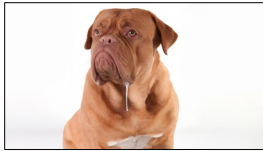
Feeling Future Hope Now

October 13, 2024

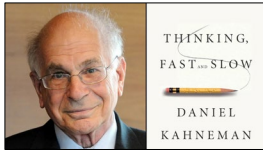
Today we're exploring the **future to improve the present**. Because nothing gives *purpose* to *today* like the *promise* of tomorrow and the *better* our expectations the *greater* our excitement. So, to get a grip on the *reality* of our goals, we need to ask: **why do you do what you do?**



Well, according to Canadian rock band *Loverboy*, **"Everybody's workin' for the weekend."** So, is that true of *you*? Does the promise of a *party* push you through the *daily grind* you *gotta* get through? *Sure!* Cuz we're fairly *simple* creatures; remember – the chemical for pleasure, *dopamine*, is directly connected to *all* the things that *could lead* to a potential *payoff*. Y'know how Pavlov's dogs started *salivating* at the *ding* of a *bell* because it meant dinner was *approaching*? Well, **rewards really ring our bell, too!**



And yet, Kenny Rogers *outsold* *Loverboy* by *31 million* albums when he suggested we should worry *more* about *risk* than reward, when he sang, **"You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away and know when to run."** Because the truth *is*, we **irrationally emphasize risk over reward**. It's a behavioral phenomenon that Daniel Kahneman called *Prospect Theory* – and it basically shows that **people fear losses more than they value gains**.



Which means that in the *age-old* decision-making *battle* between *risk* and *reward*, risk gets an *unfair advantage*; because **when we look to the future, we're more focused on fear than faith!** Which sounds *reasonable*, cuz we *can't see* the future and it's human *nature* to be *afraid* of the dark.

But, there's a *big difference* in the way our *future focus* affects our *present feelings*. **Fear of the future produces anxiety**; but **faith in the future produces anticipation**. So it all comes down to *perspective*; are we more *afraid* or *excited* for what's coming? And believe it or not, it can be *tough* to tell, cuz like Kahneman says, **avoiding loss can feel like more of a win than gaining our goal**.

So, I think we need to really *diagnose* the *difference* cuz as Christians, **our lives should bear the fruit of faith – not fear**; which is why Jesus kinda stuck it to His disciples when He said:

"Why are you so *afraid*? Do you still have no *faith*?" [cuz as Paul says,] – Mark 4:40 NIV

The *only* thing that *counts* is *faith* expressing itself through *love*. – Galatians 5:6 NIV

[And] There is *no fear* in *love*. But perfect *love* drives out *fear*, because *fear* has to do with *punishment* [in the future]. The one who *fears* is not made perfect in *love*. – 1 John 4:18 NIV

So, if our *present* life *lacks love*, it's a strong *sign* we're still focused on our *fear* of the *future*.

Because as we just read, if we had *faith*, it should already be manifesting in our lives as *love*. And *why? HOPE! Hope is the specific picture of an attractive future* – and *that* picture provides an *opportunity* for *faith* and *love* to *grow*. Paul subtly *explains* by applauding the *Colossians* for having:

The *faith* and *love* that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven – Colossians 1:5 NIV



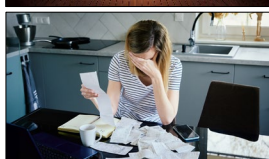
Because the life of a Christian should be characterized by eager *anticipation* and *anticipation focuses on what we hope to have*. It's all about the *future* good we're *excited* to *gain*. AKA our *eternal life* with the Lord. And as our hope grows *closer* and *clearer*, the natural *enthusiasm* and *optimism* should spill over into our lives as *faith* and *love*.

Imagine two people working the same *miserable* job, *sorting garbage*. One is told they'll get a *billion* dollars at the end of the year, the other \$30,000. Do you think their *everyday attitudes* would be the *same*? *Of course not!* *Mr. Billionaire* would probably *commute* with *kindness*, *whistle* while he worked, and constantly *encourage* his coworkers. All because every smelly second of the *present* was *overshadowed* by the *ridiculous reward* coming in the *future*. Meanwhile, *Mr. Bitterness* would likely live a life of *frustrated exhaustion* as every miserable minute made *him* question *why* he went to work when *all* the *effort* feels like a *waste* of time. Cuz truth is, *hope is the only painkiller for the present* and without *it*, we're stuck with *hurt*.

[But] Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the [future] glory that will be revealed in us. For the *creation* waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the *creation* *was subjected to frustration*, not by its *own* choice, but by the will of the One *who* subjected it, in *hope* that the *creation itself* will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought *into* the freedom and glory of the children of God. – Romans 8:18-21 NIV

Y'see, we're down *here* living with *sin* because the hope *is*, *if we sort enough garbage, eventually we'll ask the Boss why we're doing it* – and *learn* about the *reward* that changes our perspective!

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and *not* to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." – Jeremiah 29:11 NIV



Cuz Christians are promised an *eternal* life *better* than a billion bucks! So the question is, *are you living like it?* Are you workin' for the *weekend*? Cuz

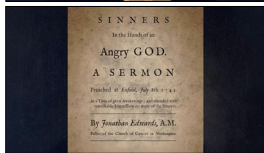
There is *surely* a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off. **[as long as you pursue. So,]** Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart on the right path [toward the reward! Cuz,] – Proverbs 23:18-19 NIV

We **[should]** wait *eagerly* for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. – Romans 8:23-24 NIV

But *here's* the human problem: while *that hope* provides the *picture* of a future we *can* eagerly *anticipate* it *also* provides a picture of a future that we'd be *miserable* to *miss*. And *anxiety* *focuses on what we're afraid to lose*.

Which is why it's *not uncommon* for Christian *hope* to slowly *transform* into earthly *anxiety*. Because just as it provided the *opportunity* for *faith* and *love* to *manifest* in our life, **hope also provides an opportunity for fear and doubt**. Cuz when hope *reveals* how rewarding our future *could be*, it *also* paints a future that would be *devastating* to *lose*. And that thought *isn't untrue*, it's just *ungodly*. Because we're *told* where our focus *should* be to *set* our heart on the *right* path:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with *thanksgiving*, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:6-7 NIV



Well, someone should tell *Jonathan Edwards!* Because although he was *responsible* for a substantial church *revival* in the 18th c. it started with a famous sermon called *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. And in *it*, he tried to convert people by focusing God's *wrath* upon unbelievers and painted a *vivid picture* of the horrors of *hell* as the alternate *future* for those who *miss out* on *heaven*. But *personally* – I just can't imagine *God* being *excited* to see His kids *anxious* and *afraid* as they *cautiously* approach the gates of *heaven*; or *wincing* at His *embrace* as they *pray* they did enough to *avoid* His eternal *wrath*. I think He'd prefer to see the *joy* of *faith fulfilled*.

And yet – *it's true*, we *can* measure the power of God's grace two ways: **focusing on the pain of His absence** or **focusing on the gain of His presence**.

So let me be clear, I'm *not* saying either should be *ignored* – both perspectives are very *important* – I'm merely saying that it seems *obvious* that God wants us to *focus* on *faith over* fear:

For God did *not* send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. [Showing His future was focused on the *hope of salvation*.] – John 3:17 NIV

[So,] *Humble* yourselves, therefore, under *God's* mighty hand, that *He* may lift you up in due time. [And] Cast all your anxiety on Him because *He* cares for *you*. – 1 Peter 5:6-7 NIV

[And wants you to say] When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. In God, whose Word I praise – in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere *mortals* do to me? – Psalms 56:3-4 NIV

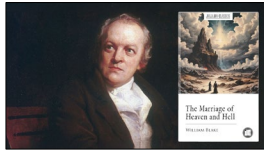


And that's more in line with *a different* pastor who *subtly* preached in a famous *speech* titled *I Have a Dream*. Cuz in it, *Martin Luther King Jr.* paints a *future* picture of *harmony* and *peace* to *faithfully pursue* rather than focusing on the *fear* that the *painful present* might *persist*. And his *hopeful* vision inspired *millions*, showing how **the anticipation of a better future can motivate courageous action in the present**. While a focus on the *fear* of ongoing *oppression* would've likely produced *anxiety* and *apathy*, prompting people to *lower* expectations and accept *less*.

But King's speech was effective at *actually building* the better future because *he knew* what *Jesus* knew: **trustful confidence is more constructive than fearful compliance**. And as Hebrews reminds:

Faith is confidence in what we *hope* for – Hebrews 11:1 NIV

So, in the end, **why we do what we do largely comes down to what we hope for; our destiny.** And that is why Christians are so concerned with the afterlife. It's the *ultimate* picture of our *ultimate* future and since the *stakes* are so *high*, it's the *object* of either ultimate *anticipation* or *anxiety*.



And we can see that manifest in *two* types of Christians: **those focused on their fear of a future hell**, or **those focused on their faith in a future heaven.** And although I'm preaching to support a perspective focused on *faith*, we need to be aware that this does not mean one *ignorant* of *fear*. Because without clearly defining the difference between good and evil or heaven and hell, we can drift into the hopeless trap of moral relativism. Cuz moral relativism is born from an unclear picture of *either* good or evil; and *without clarity*, both *fear* and *faith* lose their footing.

And that produces perspectives like William Blake's in his book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which suggested that good and evil are intertwined and *both* heaven and hell could *somehow* coexist or be reconciled *within* a person.

And since *that* idea is so *threatening* to the picture of the future *Jesus* came and died for us *to have faith in* – one of Christianity's great modern defenders, C.S. Lewis wrote a whole book in response – *pointedly* titled, ***The Great Divorce***. And with *it*, Lewis's goal was to show **that heaven and hell are irreconcilably different and there is no perfect future that can contain even the tiniest bit of imperfect sin.**

And as we've talked about in the last few months, I found *this* little book to be *packed* with *thoughtful*, *impactful*, and *useful* illustrations and analogies that help us to get a grip on the *balanced* picture of a future *with* or *without* God's presence. ... So I think we should *all* read it.

[Because we're told to] Always be prepared to give an answer to *everyone* who asks you to give the *reason* for the *hope* that you have. – 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

And *I* think a *big book club* about heaven and hell would be a great way to hammer down some *specific reasons* for the hope we *have*. After all, **we won't grow in what we don't know;**

[But] Wisdom is like honey for you: If you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your *hope* will *not* be cut off. – Proverbs 24:14 NIV

So after service, make your way to the *back* and grab a book for *10 bucks* – and if you're strapped for cash, we'll find a way to get you one. And then set aside some time and read the *first three chapters*. Cuz **in TWO WEEKS, we'll meet back here and share!** Deal?! Great! And until then:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. – Romans 15:13 NIV

Because **the more we fill up with hope and joy, that more our faith and love will spill out** – and I can't think of *anything* more inspiring to a *fearful world* dying to *believe* in a *rewarding future!*

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.