

CoreGroup Guide | Defining Moments – Part 3

Written by Christopher Burford and Jenny Huffman

Welcome

Hello friends and welcome to the third and final week of our series *Defining Moments*. Our first week focused on how looking at moments in the past could be helpful. Last week, our attention was on current moments and the possibilities God has laid before us. This week, we will discuss the importance of remembering the future. Wait, what? How are we supposed to remember moments that haven't happened yet? Well, we have some talking to do. But first, let's open with a prayer.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for gathering us together today. Thank you for the grace you have for us. Please bless our time in discussion and open our minds to new possibilities and insights. It is in your name we pray, amen.

Ice Breaker

What is the next big event you are looking forward to? This could be an upcoming trip, or maybe a play or a concert you are excited about, or maybe it's a birthday celebration or a retirement party. What future event is pulling you through right now?

The Head

Our reading this week comes from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. Now for some context on these verses, it is important first to know that Isaiah was a man in a group of many who were divinely called to be spokespeople for God. These people were called prophets. Second, the empire of Babylon had completely destroyed Israel at this time and the people of Israel who survived the destruction were taken back to Babylon to live as slaves and exiles. In these verses, Isaiah delivers a message of hope to a people who were broken, disheartened, and lost.

Isaiah 43:19-21

¹⁹*Look! I'm doing a new thing;
now it sprouts up; don't you recognize it?
I'm making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness.*

²⁰*The beasts of the field,
the jackals and ostriches, will honor me,
because I have put water in the desert
and streams in the wilderness
to give water to my people,
my chosen ones,*

²¹*this people whom I formed for myself,
who will recount my praise.*

- Why would it have been important for the people of Israel to recognize a new thing?
- What do you think the paths in the wilderness represent? Are they figurative or literal?
- It is wild to think about how exactly jackals and ostriches honor God, but God says they do. How do you imagine God's creation, like animals, showing honor to God?
- "Water in the desert" is a statement of remembrance to a time when God provided. What other times could these people of Israel remember when God provided?
- What message is being conveyed here, and what does that have to do with the new thing sprouting up?

The Heart

"The only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future."

Oscar Wilde

The choices we make today have impacts on tomorrow, which is what remembering the future is all about. We take steps towards hope when we act with intention and faith as our guide.

For example, The Gathering has recently launched two new worship sites in the Metro East and West County. There are no traditional church buildings yet for these locations so worship services are held in event spaces. Both locations have people acting with intent to deliver all (and we mean all!) of the technology, banners, instruments, and other church stuff for each service. Plus, site pastors, musicians, and leaders at those locations plan, plan, and plan some more to deliver fantastic services with the future in mind. If you have ever worshiped at those locations, you can feel God's presence; the Holy Spirit is certainly dancing among the people.

In a similar way, God is present in our lives too, beyond church buildings. And our friend, the Holy Spirit, is standing at the ready to help nudge us along. When we plan with intention using faith as our guide, so much is possible. It's important to dream about those possibilities.

- When considering the future, it sometimes helps to think about short term and long term goals. What goals are you working towards right now? Which tug at your heart the most?
- How does naming your goals help inspire you to build on the past and remember the future?
- As you reflect on where God might be nudging you to go next, what fears or worries bubble up for you?
- What choices are you considering today that may impact tomorrow?
- What does planning for the future with intention and faith look like for you?

The Hands

When things are dark and life is tough, the future is hard to visualize. The hardness of this world can feel so heavy. People die, relationships fail, and bills become due; tomorrow is so far away. How are we to dream when it's hard to breathe? It is important to remember that these dark times are not new to humanity. When the people of Israel were at their most dire moments struggling in a strange land, broken and beaten, God was there with plans for a future. He sent prophets with strong voices to deliver messages of hope and promise.

- Prophets of today may be hard to trust with all the noise that is out there, but how can we trust a message of hope?
- What are some tools to use when life becomes heavy and moving forward is necessary?
- What are some things we can do when those around us are struggling to see a future with promise?
- We all have gifts to share with others that can help move forward in faith. We are all created different; some voices are comforting, some others offer genuine listening, and some have strong acts of service skills. What are your gifts? How can you use them to help others remember the future?

Closing Prayer

God of the past, present, and future please hear our prayer. Thank you for your enduring love for us no matter what point we are in our lives. This week, we are focused on the future so we pray that you guide our ways towards paths of hope and love. Please come alongside us as we make plans for our future. It is in your name we pray, amen.