

Cybercolumn by Berry Simpson: Looking back

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CYBER COLUMN: Looking back

By Berry Simpson

I was thinking about the dinner my wife, Cyndi, and I attended in China with three other Midland couples and former Dongying Mayor Lei.

It was a fun evening with lots stories. Mayor Lei dominated the evening; he talked 75 percent of the time, and one of his favorite topics was how China is 5,000 years old and the United States is only 200 years old, yet the United States is the leader of the world. He thinks China had a lot to learn from us. He said China is too proud of its past and keeps looking back and bragging, while the West is always looking forward to the future. The mayor repeated, "China must learn to look forward."

Berry D. Simpson

It's not always easy to know when to look forward and when to look back. Both our future and our past are important.

Futurist Alvin Toffler wrote: "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn." Leonard Sweet adds, "At all times, we must be open to the

possibility that what we thought we knew is wrong.” It isn’t that the truth itself changes, but that our understanding and perception and application changes as we learn more. Often we have to forget the past and learn the future.

We just made a big decision in our church about how we were going to worship on Sunday mornings—with guitars or pipe organ. Would we leave behind the foundation of traditional worship that has been the hallmark of our historic 100-year-old church, during the flagship hour of worship, 11 a.m. Sunday, and move boldly into the future in the direction of growth and youth? That was the question. During our Sunday night business meeting, the membership voted to make the change—guitars won! It wasn’t a simple decision. It was clear that whichever way the vote went, we were bound to lose some people who felt their church had abandoned them. Russ Taff sings, “It’s hard to know which bridge to cross and which bridge I should be burning.” I think we made the right decision.

I have been surprised that the older I get, the more I embrace change. The more I read and study and teach, the more I realize I haven’t yet learned, and the more willing I am to change my mind. It’s kind of exciting, actually, to wonder what will be important to me 10 years from now.

And yet, at the same time, with my 50th birthday barely one month old, I enjoy looking back at the roots of my life and reliving the things that created the man I am today. Recently, I had a great opportunity to cross a bridge into my history and experience some of those deep roots.

Cyndi and I attended Drum Corps International’s Thunder in the Desert in Midland. Superb marching bands made up of young musicians from all over the United States compete for honors. It was amazing. The music was phenomenal, and the marching was creative and innovative and entertaining.

At the end of the contest, I was invited to help hand out awards to the top band. It was an honor to be part of the presentation, but more than that, it was a joy to be on the sidelines when the Carolina Crowns played their encore music. I love being at ground level when they play. I love having my ears and heart on the same level with their horns, and feeling the vibrations on my chest when they play. The music floods my ears and head and soul, and it makes me happy.

I spent a lot of my formative years in marching bands. I marched for Kermit Junior High, Kermit High, Hobbs High and the University of Oklahoma. That translates to thousands of hours of practicing music and marching in the blazing sun and cold wind and sometimes rain, and, I should add, being yelled at by band directors. Playing my trombone in band was a foundation of my life poured during my most impressionable years, and it was so important I still play my horn today, 30 years later.

And I think the fact I still play my horn is the reason why flashing back to marching band days is so significant. I am still living daily with the impact of all those practices and performances.

Jeremiah 6:16 says, “Stand at the crossroad and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Looking back at those ancient paths, those roots, those foundations, is important only if we use what we’ve learned on our trek into the future. We shouldn’t burn those bridges behind us that lead to our past, but we must continue to cross the bridges in front of us going boldly into God’s future.

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