

# Editorial: 7 lessons I would teach my 22-year-old self

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Do you wish you could travel back in time and talk to a younger version of yourself?

Life teaches hard lessons. Too bad we can't time-travel and tell our younger selves what we've learned. What would you say if you could talk to a 22-year-old version of you?



Marv Knox The obvious answers don't count: Make time for your family. Eat right. Get plenty of exercise. Study your Bible. Laugh. Make time for your family. (Your young self needs to hear some advice more than once.) Oh, and buy every share of Apple stock you can afford.

I also would resist the temptation to tell myself to choose another career. Who knew the newspaper industry would crater, Christianity would enter a post-denominational era, and Baptists would split? Sure, it would've been wiser to become a pediatrician or a litigator. But God blessed me as a Baptist journalist, and I have a hard time imagining doing anything else.

Still, if I could visit myself in the spring of 1979, less than two months before I graduated from college and got married, here are seven lessons I'd teach:

**1. Do the hard stuff first.**

I still haven't run a full marathon. I trained for one three years ago, got hurt and haven't made it. Maybe I'll run one this fall, after my 60th birthday. But I wish I'd tried when I was 25 and stronger.

A similar principle applies to much of life: Get the difficulties out of the way. If you face a hard decision, make it and move on. If you must do an awful job, get it over with. Life is smoother when you knock obstacles out of the way. Others will pop up, of course. But if you never spend time fretting over them, you've got more time to enjoy the in-between.

## **2. Savor, savor, savor.**

John Mellencamp sings: "Life is short, even in its longest days." That's particularly true for parenting and marriage. Even the most tedious aspects of child-rearing and the most challenging trials of marriage pass in a blink. Surprisingly, some of the most painful experiences also deliver moments of grace. And they're gone.

Youth wastes time longing for the future. How sad to realize the "good old days" were good only in hindsight. Each moment may be miraculous, but only if you inhabit it fully. Savor.

## **3. Reconsider first impressions.**

Some people you thought were jerks turn out to be dear. Food you thought was yucky turns out to be delicious. Some ugly covers bind beautiful books.

If you limit your life to the people, experiences and ideas that appeal to you from the start, you'll miss joy, friendship, mystery and wonder.

## **4. Keep your hands open.**

You'll never regret being generous, but you'll look back in shame upon the times you were selfish. You won't regret great friends, but you'll feel badly about the people you pushed away. You'll never regret saying yes to God,

but you'll never get over saying no.

Generosity—of things, of spirit, of relationship, of curiosity—multiplies life's blessings and opportunities. Greed and stinginess always cripple.

## **5. Be brave.**

Remember when you were 6, taking swimming lessons, and first in line by the side of the pool to jump into the lifeguard's arms? Remember you chickened out, and John Mark went first, and jumping in next just wasn't as thrilling as it might have been? That was a life lesson.

Every time fear takes control, your horizon narrows. When fear grabs the reigns, the ride never is as fulfilling, exciting and purposeful as it might have been.

The Apostle Paul offered young Timothy sound advice when he said, "God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power, love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7). Life is better—and more God-centered—when we refuse to be afraid.

## **6. Soften your heart as you grow older.**

If you're not careful, life's hard experiences can change your character—make you bitter, angry and downright mean. I've seen this happen to people, and the worst thing to happen to them wasn't the calamity, but what they made of it.

On the other hand, life's knocks and bruises can teach vital lessons. Like humility, because we're not as great as we wish or as awful as we fear. Also empathy, because that other person just might be us someday. And perspective, because we can't control life or predict its outcome.

## **7. Appreciate the beauty of moonbeams.**

Even when you live through dark, hard times—and you will live through

dark, hard times—God’s grace is as near as your next breath. In fact, it’s impossible to appreciate grace and mercy and hope until you travel hard roads and peer into darkness.

In fact, you will learn to find a measure of comfort in even the direst circumstances, because that’s when God’s presence is most real. Like a mushroom, your spiritual life often grows best in the dark.

In those seasons, remember Jesus said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The Apostle Paul promised, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28) and also: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).