

LANCASTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY CONVOCATION
JANUARY 17, 2020 @ 4:00 p.m.
THE POWER OF MOMENTS

Opening

Thank you, Dr. McNairy-Nelson for your kind introduction. I am most grateful to Dr. Lycht for inviting me to speak at this convocation, which happens to be her last. When I was first contacted to serve as today's speaker, I started thinking about what I can say that will be meaningful and productive for everyone present, or in other words, how can I create intersections that will resonate with everyone here.

After putting the first full draft together, I noticed that most of the remarks was based on experiences at key

moments in the past. That was the instant when I realized that this presentation will vastly improve by focusing it on moments in our lives that collectively make us who we are and where we are going.

As the saying goes: “Life is NOT made up of seconds, minutes, hours, days or years, but of MOMENTS.” So here we go, I want to share my thoughts about the POWER OF MOMENTS in our lives that has brought us to this beautiful and historic sanctuary. Some of our moments may coincide and others may be far apart. However, in the end our lives are intersecting for the next several moments.

Webster's Dictionary defines a moment as a particular point in time. Hence, it is logical to say that TIME, as we know it, is made up of moments, which can vary from a MILLISECOND to EONS of years. At times the moment can be related to the importance of what happened, which may be immediate or delayed. In some cases, the moment may not even be realized until later on when we reflect on what was going on at a particular time.

And while we remember some of these moments very well, there are others that we would rather forget.

Now, before I go any further, I have a disclaimer. This talk is not about time management or how to use our

time but rather an effort to discuss how to make the best use of every moment that we have, such as now.

If time is made up of moments, the question then becomes, what is the difference between the two? For starters, in two of the Ghanaian languages that I speak, the same word is used for “time” and “moment”. In Fanti, the word is “mbir” and in Ga time and moment are both called “bei”. This interchangeable use of moment and time is a reflection of how we view life in my culture. Let me elaborate on this point: As a teenager, I spent several days during vacations with my maternal grandfather. He had a favorite lazy chair that

he used every day. One morning when I woke up very early, around 5:00 a.m., he was sitting in the chair reading at the same location that he was when I went to bed the night before. So, I asked him whether he slept? He said “Yes”, but he went on further that it is good practice to see the sunrise every day and also be the last person to sleep. You might wonder where I am going with this story but let’s set it aside for now because I will come back later to explain its relevance to the interchangeable nature of time and moments in the Ghanaian culture.

Psychologists often refer to the concept of **defining moments** in our lives as certain events that shape the person we have become. But looking back at the moments in my life, I can put them into four major baskets namely:

- **Moments of realization**
- **Moments of reflection/introspection**
- **Moments of discernment**
- **Moments of acceptance**

Now let's talk about the first moment: **REALIZATION**

Often, we go through a moment of realization when an unexpected situation develops that clarifies or explains

a previous incident or serves as a continuation of an experience that occurred long ago, at times, several decades apart. For example, in the Old Testament, Jonah didn't understand why he couldn't get away from his fate of ending up on the island of Nineveh. Try as he did, our Creator had other plans for him. Ultimately, he ended up where the Lord wanted him and that was his moment of realization.

So, let me share my Jonah experience with you. In the late 1960s, my dad used to take me on weekend trips to what I considered to be our hometown, which is about 2 hours west of the capital city, Accra, where we lived.

Usually, he left me with my grandmother and went to one of the neighboring towns to visit for several hours.

One day, on our way back home from the trip, I asked him about where he went and for what purpose? He told me that he had responsibilities at the town he visited but I was too young to understand. He promised that at the appropriate time, he will explain.

Unfortunately for me, he didn't live long enough to tell me himself because he passed away a year later.

About a decade ago, during a visit to Ghana, my mother told me emphatically that because I had unfinished responsibilities, some people were watching every

move I made. I took what she said for granted as a concerned parent who was reminding me about her expectations. She suggested I talk to someone on the phone to explain that statement. I was expecting to hear from one of my relatives who needed financial assistance. Instead, I heard this voice that sounded very much like my father's and that sent shivers down my spine. After initial pleasantries, he asked me to start preparing to take up my new role. In probing to get a clarification on that statement, he explained what my dad told me when I was a kid. That was a moment of realization because I was talking to my uncle, who was the occupant of the throne on which I sit today. Such

moments occur whether we are prepared for them or not. Our challenge is to be able to recognize when that happens and determine what to do.

Let's move the second type of moments:

INTROSPECTION

There have been moments when we look back at an incident to make sense of what happened. Being able to reflect on such instances and examine our conscious thoughts and feelings is described as introspection.

The process of introspection relies exclusively on the observation of one's mental state, while in a spiritual context, it may refer to the examination of one's soul. Having such moments of introspection is a normal life

experience but its frequency differs from person to person. Often people who are described as deep thinkers tend to have more moments of introspection than others.

My example of a moment of introspection occurred just before we moved to Millersville. In my effort to move up professionally from my former role, I applied to several universities. As a finalist in one of the searches, the executive headhunter and search committee chair were very supportive. It was therefore a surprise when the position was offered to another candidate, who had less experience and appeared to be less prepared for the role. Six months after the new president arrived on

that campus, he was let go. At that time the search firm reached out to me, but I politely declined because I found out that there were so many insurmountable challenges at that university. My moment of introspection occurred during the six months while I was chasing other opportunities, because I had to step back and carefully reflect on why the position wasn't a good fit for me.

Introspection and reflection are all about getting to know yourself at the core, uncovering your values and then deciding the best action to take. You take the power away from the way you've been conditioned,

away from external stimuli, by bringing your focus of control back to where it belongs, within you. Often times, this situation occurs during meditation.

Once we are able to do that, we can move to the next type of moments, which is discernment of our condition or situation.

Moments of discernment

We've all had moments when we think about or look back at an incident or experience in our life only to get a different interpretation or understanding of what happened. Such instances are often multi-layered, and our ability to dig deeper leads to discernment. To get to

this level, we need to focus on the why, how and what of the situation. In most cases, answering these questions are not enough until we can connect the dots from the past through the present, and at times to the future. This last part of connecting to the future can be tricky because as Jerry Zucker puts it, “It's great to plan for your future. Just don't live there, because really nothing ever happens in the future. Whatever happens occurs now, so live your life where the action is — now”.

Now let me share the story of a person who connected the dots through discernment and later became successful. In 1981, the investment bank, Salomon

Brothers was acquired by Phibro Corporation and several employees were laid off. Instead of wallowing in the effects of being a failure, one of the employees used his severance package to set up a new company. The motivation came from a discernment that Wall Street was willing to pay for high quality business information in real time. Fast forward two decades later, he became one of the wealthiest persons in the world by multiplying his severance package over ten thousand times. While this is not a typical situation, the key point here is that discernment can be a make or break point in our lives. I know everyone in this audience can think about such moments.

In Christianity, discernment has several meanings. It can be used to describe the process of determining God's desire in a situation or for identifying the true nature of something. In its simplest definition, discernment is the ability to decide between truth and error or right and wrong. For our purposes today, the capacity to think with discernment is synonymous with an ability to think biblically. It is up to us to look out for the moments of discernment because God's Word has equipped us with the ability to discern.

Let's talk about the next moment: ACCEPTANCE

Our moments of acceptance occur more often than we think. After going through realization and/or

introspection followed by discernment, we end up at a moment of acceptance. This process is not always sequential because there are times when some of the steps can be skipped between moments of realization and acceptance. Also, there are times when some of these moments occur simultaneously. Ultimately, acceptance of a situation, experience or condition may serve as the foundation for starting our moments all over again.

But let's talk about examples of moments of acceptance. Think about all the times when we didn't get a desired outcome. Initially, it may be difficult to fathom why. But after going through the three previous

moments, whether sequentially or not, we have to accept the situation in order to move forward. The moment of acceptance can be difficult but getting to that point after introspection and discernment can lessen the blow. As future leaders of congregations, it will be unimaginable that you will not face situations where you have to go through a moment of acceptance to bring closure for a congregant or yourself. Whenever you find yourself in that situation, it is important to remember that this moment can only serve as the beginning of a new cycle. Why? Because we don't often get to choose the time of our **defining moments**. But when it happens, it is wise to have faith to face it.

These four types of moments in our lives tend to determine who we are based on how we notice and react to them. And unlike time, which usually occurs in a linear form, moments are not always linear or sequential. As the existential philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard said “Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards”.

That brings me back to my grandfather’s suggestion about seeing the sunrise every morning. During what happened to be my last conversation with him before he passed in 1989, he taught me how to use the

direction and length of my shadow from the sun to guess the time of day. But the most prescient comment he made was that the moment he taught me this trick occurred only once but the particular time of the day at which he taught me will occur every day, so we should cherish every moment we spend with loved ones. Yes, that is the power of moments!

CONCLUSION

Personal story?????

As the ancient Chinese philosopher, Laozi, said “Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering

**yourself is true power.” One way to master ourselves is
to know our moments and make use of them.**

**So, in conclusion, I want to leave you with this poem by
an unknown author:**

**To KNOW the will of God is the greatest knowledge,
To FIND the will of God is the greatest discovery,
To DO the will of God is the greatest achievement.**

**Thank you for your attention and MAY ALL YOUR
MOMENTS BE FILLED WITH KNOWING, FINDING AND
DOING GOD’S WILL.**