

## DEAR TWENTYSOMETHING SELF

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Dear Twentysomething Self,

I remember being your age. I remember the twenties as the decade of extremes, decisions and pressures, choices and chances. It was a place of both dismal responsibility and intoxicating independence, of Spartan duties and thrilling opportunities. It was emotional, confusing, and overwhelming, but also fun, adventurous, and exciting.

I'm glad it's over.

Perhaps no other decade of life comes with a stronger urge to cast off restraint and discretion, to forsake all religious or spiritual ties, and indulge, experiment, gratify, and revel. You're grappling with all of that now and I feel again the war inside, the raging battle between prudence and pleasure, between your way and God's way, between your plan and His plan. You're wondering what's really at stake, what's the big deal. It seems like everyone is having more fun or going more places; everyone has got it going on but you.

They don't, but that's how it seems.

All you ever seem to do is wait and yearn and deny yourself, while you watch others who are younger or less deserving or more foolish or proud achieve, succeed, arrive. You're lonely, bereft, disappointed.

Today I'm writing this letter from the comfort of your future home, the one you buy with your own money. Well, yours and your spouse's. (Yes, you'll get married one day! You'll also have a few kids. I know you worry about that more than you want to admit.)

You are enjoying a rare, lazy Saturday after a pretty good week at work. You land a good job shortly after college and enjoy an unusual amount of success and satisfaction from it. You go to a great church, live in a safe neighborhood, own a couple cars, have some great friends. You turn out OK. More than OK, in fact! God has blessed you. But more important than all of that, you're right in the center of God's will and design for you.

It almost wasn't this way.

You won the battle you were fighting, but it was looking a bit dicey for a while. In the heat of the moment, at the peak of the struggle, you nearly lost sight of all that was at stake; if it wasn't for the prayers of your parents, pastor, and a few godly mentors, you probably wouldn't have pulled through. There were battle wounds to mend and you underwent a period of recovery, but you made it.

Lust is a powerful emotion. I know the word carries sexual connotations, but I just mean lust in general—the intense longing for something we desire. Lust demands immediate satisfaction, and once it is satiated, leaves us completely dissatisfied and always craving more. It is human nature to lust, and it is also human nature to turn to objects, people, and pleasures that are inevitably inferior and totally incompetent to fulfill those lusts. Why? Because we weren't created for this world, so it can't help but leave us dissatisfied. We were created for paradise, for eternal access to glories and wealth unimaginable with a constant, unbreakable connection with God, our Creator, the only true source of our heart's content. We are hardwired for this type of world; we all experience a deep, insatiable longing for it, and we are completely incapable of fulfilling it.



Few turn to God first and foremost to appease this extreme soul-hunger; more often than not, He stands as our last choice, the extreme final alternative, the One to whom we run when everything else has completely failed us, even when we knew better. So often we end up coming to Him shattered, broken, stripped bare, abused, mistreated.

You are truly blessed, even now in your hardship. Many of the friends and acquaintances in the world around you who seem so carefree and satisfied, so liberated to do what they want whenever they want without repercussion or moral conflict, who are achieving and attaining, secure and happy, will one day be world-weary, frustrated, burdened, struggling, cynical, disenchanted with the merry-go-round of sin, with the consequences that come when we transgress God's law and moral order.

I assure you, your surrender to God, a difficult, sometimes excruciating life decision, which runs so counter to our wills and desires, will result in fulfillment and reward. Make no mistake; you are trudging down a difficult road. It is hard to continually resist those urges to satisfy your own lusts and fulfill your own designs and instead follow the directions of Someone Else who persistently and without fail beckons you in the opposite direction of those wants for something He claims will be better, if you just trust Him. It is hard to continually keep the commitment to deny the lust of the moment in exchange for the promised, fuller happiness that always lingers, rather mockingly, in the distant future, never knowing when that future will finally arrive, or if it will arrive at all. But when you sow a life of self-denial, of continued, often shaky faith in the promise of God when all hope was truly blighted, of commitment and dedication to One who promised He'd never forsake you, but often allows you to feel forsaken and forgotten, you will one day reap a reward beyond your imagination or expectation. It is a spiritual principle; it cannot fail.

In this desert place where you feel stripped naked of all hope, totally despondent and heartbroken, lonely and even barren, God is teaching you a hard lesson, a lesson totally unnatural to fallen human beings. Unfortunately, He has to strip you bare in order to teach it. It is this: He is literally all you need. If you have Him and that's all you have, then you have everything, no matter what you lack externally. He is teaching you how to feed your soul hunger.

Not everyone learns how to do this. Do you wonder why? The battle raging in your heart and mind is part of the training, and it is agonizing. Not everyone chooses to do it. Besides your peers "in the world" who perhaps don't know any better, there are folks on pews who prefer to be left alone and lead good lives, and who can blame them? But the challenge for every Christian is first discovering and then surrendering to God's design for their creation in the first place. You've already discovered God's plan for your life and the early vision of it was mesmerizing, but the road to that purpose has been unexpectedly trying. And long. You're tired and ready to give in.

Don't!

You cannot inhabit the promise without being prepared for it. It's too big and too grand for you to possess as you are right now. You need to be trained and groomed in order to occupy that place with skill, wisdom, and composure. The more you advance in God, the more is at stake should you fail. It is both God's wisdom and His undying love for the souls you will impact that causes Him to be hard on you now. Submit to His hand. It's only a season. The end result will indeed make you forget your current pain.

Hang on just a little while longer. It will be worth it.

Sincerely,  
Your Future Self