

October 7, 2015

Living in the Now

Ana Vergara

What I took away most from the great philosophers we studied, in particular Marcus Aurelius, was their wisdom when it came to the matter of living life like it's our last day and enjoying every second of the present. In this day and age especially, when our daily activities are planned to the minute and we are taught to think of the future from a very early age, the Emperor's words are refreshing and remind us that all that is guaranteed is right now, and we tend to miss it while we are busy either regretting yesterday's blunders or worrying about tomorrow's problems. As a college freshman, I find myself getting anxious as I try to figure out a new phase in my life. I feel like I need to know exactly what will happen next semester, or even what I will do after I graduate. As much time as I spend thinking about it, the truth is I don't even know what will happen tomorrow.

When we come to terms with the fact that we can't control everything, we can comprehend that over-planning for the future is useless. It's important to have goals and a clear direction of where we are going, but we don't have the luxury of worrying about what we will face tomorrow, simply because tomorrow is not secure. Moreover, we can't accurately predict or control what exactly will happen. Unforeseen events can occur in a second and can change the entire landscape of our future lives, and worrying about it won't stop them from happening. Marcus Aurelius advises:

Don't panic before the picture of your entire life. Don't dwell on all the troubles you've faced or have yet to face, but instead ask yourself as each trouble comes: What is so unbearable or unmanageable in this? Your reply will embarrass you. Then remind yourself that it's not the future or the past that bears down on you, but only the present, always the present, which becomes an even smaller thing when isolated in this way and when the mind that cannot bear up under so slender an object is chastened. (*The Emperors' Handbook, Chapter Eight*).

Freshman year is challenging, but the best way to deal with it is taking it one problem at a time, not getting restless over them before they actually happen. By focusing too much on the future, we don't give the present the attention it deserves. We have to devote our time to whatever it is required of us in that precise moment. The author of *Ecclesiastes* writes in Chapter 3 about this in a beautiful way. He says, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every

October 7, 2015

purpose under the heaven." (*Ecclesiastes 3:1*). To me, this means that when we are engaged in an activity, we should focus on that and only that. Multi-tasking, although undeniably a great quality to possess, often takes away the enjoyment of things. When we are in class, we should participate and try to learn as much as we can, instead of fantasizing about our weekend plans. Likewise, when we are having lunch with friends, we should put away our phone and enjoy the friends we have in front of us. We live in a society that glorifies being busy all the time and doing everything at once, and how do we expect to enjoy life when we don't make time for anything? Our society also expects instant results and is becoming increasingly impatient. *Ecclesiastes'* Chapter 3 emphasizes seasons to remind us that the world works in cycles and we shouldn't try to hurry it up. *The Emperor's Handbook* also mentions this principle, telling us to "concentrate on the work at hand" (*Book Eight*).

It is only when we grasp how delicate our life is that we can truly start living. When we take into account the short time we are given, we realize what is important. The last thing I want is to look back at my freshman year of college and not have any special memories because I was too caught up stressing about meaningless details of the uncertain future.