

The Butterfly Effect

Touching the past seems to be an instrumental part of finding who we are, of finding our soul, so to speak. Memories are like transfusions from the past that can give us strength and allow us to find our center, to get back to who we really want to be. I always thought that it would be good to have a map of these special points in our lives.

My friend in the Heartbook lab and I had often talked about our memories, and the “touch points” of the past that seemed to anchor us in what we have become. I think of moments when I came to the surface of reality, in a sense, and breathed in something that has stayed with me ever since. Such memories come back to me again and again – times from my childhood, from school days, those with my son, etc. They remind me of the stakes we use to keep a tent from blowing away¹.

I remember the time I decided that as a young man that I wanted to be a good influence or example, and I asked my minister to help me. I wanted to make my mark for Good, but I eventually found out that I needed to let God work through me. I now look back on my life to see where (or if) I had actually had an impact for Good. I have not always treated people with love, and I am almost afraid to look. I do make an effort to pray to bless all the people that I have had contact with, and hope that they will be able to forgive me if I have offended them. I also pray that I do not hurt others in any way.

I remembered Jesus as He portrayed the separation of the sheep and the goats², and its parallel to God’s judgment. At the root of this story was the self-evaluation that we all perform relative to our lives. I think of the apparent surprise, in both directions, from those who were confronted with their actions. It made me wonder about my own status – whether I had been an influence for Good or not. I think it is certainly part of God’s purpose for us.

It was also clear that there were some, who in their own humility did not see themselves as being or doing Good to others that were the lowest and the least, that had actually impressed or inspired the King³. Before the separation, I’m sure that they wondered: Will I be accepted by God? Am I pleasing to Him? Have I lived the life that He wanted me to live? How great it would be to impress and inspire the Creator!

My friend showed me a new instrument that he had developed which enabled people to connect back in the past to critical events in their lives⁴. It allowed them look back and see the influence they have had on others, and how the effect of that influence spreads. He was eager to show me how it worked, and adjusted the “history” knob for my own life until I saw a disturbance in the display. It was like a bright expanding cone moving from left to right, and my friend told me that it was a point where I had influenced someone for good, and it had impacted their lives significantly. He likened it to the so-called “butterfly effect”, where it is thought that the flapping of butterfly wings can influence the weather on the other side of the globe.

I was extremely interested as he showed me the power of his device. But he cautioned me that it could also show the dark side – shadowy valleys and dark holes that moved forward as well to show when we had been a bad influence and had hurt others.

He touched the screen and an icon of a butterfly appeared at the vertex of the cone that we had seen earlier. He smiled and said that he called these positive interactions “butterflies” (the negative ones he called “wasps”), and he began to scroll forward to see the extent of the influence. Other cones appeared in the path of the original one, and he explained that we were witnessing a “domino” or “chain reaction” effect. The various swirls were color coded in a false-color display similar to what I had seen that visualizes turbulent air flow around an airfoil.

The brightness of the entire display grew, too, as the cumulative effect of that initial act increased.

My friend showed me that in the vast landscape of my life that there were a several butterflies here and there (and unfortunately a few wasps, as well). I could not help but to ask about my wife⁵, and artist and teacher who I felt had touched the lives of many – especially her students. He said that indeed he could show that to me, but that I must be forewarned that teachers had the most influence on other lives than anyone.

So when he called up my wife’s map, I was completely overwhelmed to see an immense cloud of swarming, shimmering, iridescent butterflies. The wind from their wings was like a great storm rolling over the plains. Indeed, as I learned, a group of butterflies is sometimes called a kaleidoscope⁶, and this appeared to be very fitting. My friend was also amazed at the intensity of my wife’s projected influence into the future. He commented on how special she must be, and how many souls that she had touched and lifted up to fly with her.

I commented on how impressed I was with the new equipment. My friend just grinned and accepted the compliment. I began to think about someone who had the greatest influence ever in the world, and I asked my friend if we could view His influence. My friend, who had been grinning from my compliment, suddenly became very serious.

“That would create a disastrous overload to the circuits⁷!” he said as his grin faded. “It would be overpowered and ruined. But you don’t need this device to see! His influence is very obvious to anyone who has a mind open to Goodness.”

I thanked him for letting me have a look at his newest invention. We agreed to have another viewing at a later date. I had gained a much greater appreciation for those who truly touched other souls, and in the mean time I wanted to try to increase my own kaleidoscope!

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1. I remember one occasion when Zach and I were camping and our unstaked tent “wandered” a hundred yards away before we recovered it.
2. Matthew 25:31-46
3. consider how Jesus commented on the widow who gave the two mites (all she had to live on), Mark 12:41ff
4. other options include seeing where we have been “touched” or “inspired” by someone else, and measuring the depth of beautiful memories of events that gave us great joy
5. think about when Peter asked about what would happen to John, John 21:15ff
6. a group of butterflies can also be called a flight, flutter, or swarm
7. consider the swirling flames and wind at Pentecost as the Holy Spirit “influenced” the disciples to preach the gospel at the establishment of the new kingdom, the church