I am a registered, card-carrying history nerd. I love places like Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation, where they create living history. I’m the first in line to tour historic old homes. My reading consists of spirituality/theology during the day ... and history at night.

I love history, but I don’t want to live in it.

I’m amazed, though, by how many people want to live in the past. They probably would deny that, but there’s a longing for “the good old days.” They look back fondly on simpler times ... when people were nicer ... when things were built to last. One survey noted that half of adults over the age of 50 say the past was better than the present.

The past was never as good as we remember it. The past had world wars, a cold war with global nuclear annihilation hanging over us, and higher infant mortality rates. People didn’t live as long, and suffering was greater. And, no, we weren’t necessarily more civil or nicer. Try convincing an African-American that life was better in the 1950s.

According to Nick Chater, a professor with the Behavioral Science Group of the Warfield Business School, we have a psychological bias to see things with a “rose-tinted” memory. In other words, we remember good things in our lives far better than we remember bad things. But in the present moment, we tend to see the bad things rather than the good. For example, if today included a favorite song on the radio you hadn’t heard in awhile, an enjoyable lunch with co-workers, a pleasant call to your mother, and a flat tire during rush-hour traffic, you go to bed focused on the flat tire.

Sadly, a desire to live in the past is often seen in the church.

The old songs were better than the new songs.

Good luck convincing the millennials with that one. And you wonder why they don’t attend.

In reality, a preacher may be holding a Bible, but he’s too often just preaching from all his notes crammed into the Bible. Whereas, the pastor with an iPad may be looking at multiple translations of the Bible.

I’m upset the pastor didn’t preach from his Bible; he preached from an iPad. (Yes, I’ve heard this one.)

Things were obviously better “back then” because we had a large youth ministry.

Maybe your student ministry is no longer thriving because you’re offering a 1988 ministry to a flock of 2018 teenagers.

Let me be clear. I loved the revivals I attended as a kid. I was a teenager when youth choirs were huge. I still love the “Jesus music” and songs from when Contemporary Christian music was in its infancy. But culture has changed, and the way we communicate and do ministry has changed.

My understanding of this changed several years ago after reading the Ed Stetzer book, Breaking the Missional Code. We know the church needs to keep up with the culture, but we need to do it with a missionary mindset. When a missionary first comes to an unreached people group, he learns the specific culture and language. He finds how to bring the timeless truth of the gospel into their unique culture.

Each church should do the same. Learn the culture of the community around us. Adapt. Change. Speak their language. Changing does not mean the way we did things was inferior or wrong, but it worked for that time and place. What worked in 1988 may not be effective today.

For older churches with a long history, celebrate the past. Rejoice in the ways God once used Sunday night services, a large choir in robes, and a bus ministry—but don’t cling to it. And add to your rejoicing a spirit of joyful anticipation of how God will use today’s musical styles, social media, and trends to reach people and disciple them. In the days and years to come, new ways of ministering to people will open up, and we will continually be looking for ways to bring the gospel into the culture..

By the end of the Book of Esther, the Jewish people had gained a great victory. They had much cause for celebration—and they did. (In fact, they are still celebrating the Feast of Purim.) But even as the people celebrated what happened in the past, they moved forward. They kept their vigilance.

Celebrate the past but move forward. Be diligent in seeing how we can be ever adapting to meet people where they live—and how they live—with the unchanging truth of God’s word.

So let’s rejoice that our God is not limited to 1974-style ministry. Nor ministry as it was done in 50 A.D. Frankly, I don’t look good in sandals.