

# Cross Current



*Real help for real life*

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## Lost Perspective

It's gone for good, but it's not good it's gone.

Some of the world's greatest treasure is lost forever and we're all poorer for it. Plays, books, films, art, and even classic TV shows have been lost or destroyed, leaving a gaping hole in our cultural record.

Even the work of William Shakespeare isn't fully preserved. That's because he wrote his plays quickly and in snatches, often jotting lines on scraps of paper for actors to memorize.

Those fragments were collected and used to publish his plays when he died. Though 36 plays were found, at least two are missing: *Cardenio*, an adaptation of the novel *Don Quixote*, and *Love's Labour's Won*, a sequel to *Love's Labour's Lost*.

In the modern era, a stunning 80 per cent of all silent movies ever made were lost. Most early film stock had a nitrate base, to give black and white images better contrast, but nitrate catches fire easily and almost every major studio had a big storehouse fire. Also, nitrate disintegrates if not kept in climate-controlled vaults. Since studios didn't understand the lasting value of their movies, they often kept them just anywhere and melted them down so their silver content could be sold. By the 1960s, companies had switched to fireproof vaults and film stock with a safer acetate base, but fire wasn't the only problem.

In the very first Marx Brothers movie, *Humor Risk* (1921) Harpo played a detective chasing Groucho. It bombed so the Marxes destroyed the only copy. The first Laurel and Hardy hit, *Hats Off* (1927) disappeared when someone misplaced the only existing print.

Early TV shows fared no better. When videotape was introduced in 1956 it was very expensive so most recorded programs were taped over the next day. Most of the first ten years of *The Tonight Show*



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with Johnny Carson are gone. So are all but a few episodes of game shows like *To Tell the Truth*, *Concentration* and *Match Game*. The BBC's recording of the 1969 moon landing was taped over. Both CBS and NBC broadcast Super Bowl 1 but neither kept the recording.

Other losses include Vincent Van Gogh paintings destroyed in World War Two bombings, a Picasso that went down in a 1998 plane crash off Nova Scotia, and an unpublished Ernest Hemingway novel and short story collection stolen in 1922.

All of this is a timely reminder that so much of what we spend a lifetime trying to accomplish will be lost. It's a theme that dominates the fascinating book of Ecclesiastes where the wise man Solomon declares that value and meaning can't be found in education, pleasure, money, or achievement because almost none of it will last.

Like Shakespeare's plays, our lives are fragments written daily, all too quickly. But much of what we value will not be preserved. For most of us, what we do will seldom survive us and, in any case, will soon be forgotten. But what we are — and the godly effect we have on others — can shape the hearts and lives of those who come after us and live on as a legacy of God's light and love, long after we're gone.

That love is the difference between day and night — make that day and nitrate. If we're not careful, we lose so much to anger and envy, or greed, lust and selfishness. They can explode into flames, incinerate our example and reputation, and reduce to ash our earnest intentions.

If self-centredness is the base upon which our life story is printed, our spirituality slowly disintegrates until there's virtually nothing left for others to see. Our spiritual legacy survives only when it's in a climate controlled by the Spirit of God. Otherwise, we don't recognize the lasting value of life's truly important things and short-sightedly melt everything down to what we can have here and now.

Though sometimes we deliberately destroy our past to hide our failure — even when it could bless others — we also suffer the loss of precious things because of the carelessness or callousness of others. Most times though, we simply replace one day with the next, seldom considering what's meaningful and of lasting value. Before we know it, it's all gone. Listen to Solomon: "Remember God before you near the grave... For then the dust will return to the earth and the spirit will return to God who gave it." (Ecc. 12:5,7) What have you got to lose?