



Why worry about new technology? How today's future soon fades into the past.

by Isaac Phiri

Shape, Don't Chase, *the Future*

I February 2000. You survived Y2K. You made it to the millennium. You made it to the future. So what?

Frankly, I think the future and history exchange places too quickly. Remember when the fax was the future? You were able to send images over phone lines and they appeared on the other end of the world in real time and decent quality. Today, you feel obliged to apologize when saying "I will fax this to you." People expect you to say "I will e-mail this to you."

I went to Manila, Philippines recently. It seemed everyone was running around with cell phones. Same thing in Cape Town, South Africa. Same thing in Lusaka, Zambia. I live in Colorado Springs. I do not have a cell phone. I should get one, I saw one on TV. It can do things: e-mail, fax, voicemail, the internet, everything. At least, so they say. But by the time I get one, cell phones, as I know them, will be outdated. I have missed out on the future again.

This is not the first time I am missing out on the future. When I was growing up we had a two-band radio. An Omega. Good

The excitement is not about publishing, but about the new technology.

brand. Then one day I went window shopping at an electronics store. They had bigger and better radios. Better sound, better looks, better reception. More buttons and knobs. I had missed on the future.

The next time I missed out on the future was when I saved some money and bought a tape recorder. The sales person told me it was the latest model. He was wrong. The next day (or so it seemed) I saw more modern boom boxes. They had all the bells and whistles a teenager wants. Mom told me my machine was "not that bad." After all, it recorded and

played well. Mom did not understand. The future had swept past me.

I could tell you more but the point is, technology is always changing. A futuristic gadget today is archaic the next day. In publishing, futuristic ideas today are stale by the end of the publishing season. New equipment is outdated before you set it up.

In retrospect, mom was right. My tape recorder did record and play reasonably well. It did meet my needs. Unfortunately, I was more interested in the appearance of the latest machine on the market. I wanted something I could brag about.

Occasionally—actually, frequently—I hear publishers brag about the latest technology their organizations have acquired. New computers. New software. Speed. Bytes. Memory. However, I hear very little about how this latest acquisition will improve their work. When such conversations start, publishers without new toys shrink back. I know the feeling. It is like they are missing out on the future. What is unfortunate about all this is that the excitement is about technology—catching up with it, that is. The excitement is not about publishing.

Technology is simply a tool. Like the future, technology can be elusive. You can never really catch up with it. This is particularly true when working with limited financial resources. By the time you acquire some hardware or software or get hooked up with some service, there will be newer and better things on the market.

As Christians in publishing, we should not spend all our time chasing the latest technology. Our call is to publish, to communicate our message. So, keep an eye on the latest toys. When feasible, acquire them. But don't become a technology addict. Instead, publish and shape the future.❖