

Looking Back to Look Forward: Spiritual Remembrance

Deuteronomy—The Book of Remembering

Remembering: Lev. 23; Ex. 13:3; 20:8; Dt. 5:15; 7:17-19; 8:2, 18; 24:9; 32:7; Joshua 1:13; 4:1-8; 1 Chr. 16:12-18; Ps. 63:5-8; 77:11; 103:2-5; 105-106; Matt. 16:9; Luke 15:17; John 15:20; Eph. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:8.

Forgetting: Ex. 16:1-3; Num. 11:4-6; Dt. 4:9; 6:12; 8:11-20; 9:7; 25:19; Judges 8:34-35; Ps. 78:11, 42; 103:2-5; 106:7, 13-14, 21; 2 Peter 1:9.

“We could summarize the message of Deuteronomy with the phrase ‘do not forget.’ The key to remaining faithful to God and living in faith was, in large part, remembering who God is and what God had done for Israel.”¹ Thabiti Anyabwile

Deuteronomy 7:17–21

“If you say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?’ ¹⁸ you shall not be afraid of them but **you shall remember** what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, ¹⁹ the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So will the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. ²⁰ Moreover, the Lord your God will send hornets among them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed. ²¹ You shall not be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God.”

5 Things to Know about Remembering in the Bible

1. Remembering is learning from and living in light of God’s work in my past.

Remembering is letting God’s work in the past have a bearing on the present. Remembering isn’t just a mental activity that reflects on history as if it’s an interesting fact, but remembering is how we experience the past and live in light of it. It’s calling to mind something from the past and living in light of that memory.

“In our Western (Greek) intellectual heritage, ‘remembering’ means ‘recollecting’: recalling to mind something that is no longer a present reality. Nothing could be further from a Jewish conception. For example, in the Jewish liturgy, ‘remembering’ means participating here and now in certain defining events in the past and also in the future.”²

“And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness,” (Deut. 8:2)

“Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the

¹ Thabiti Anyabwile, “Strengths We’ve Lost: Missions,” 10/24/13 <https://thefrontporch.org/2013/10/strengths-weve-lost-missions/> accessed on 1/10/19.

² Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 799.

Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,” (Deut. 8:11-14)

“You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” (Deut. 8:18)

2. The Bible encourages us both to remember and exhorts us not to forget.

We are prone to forget God’s Word, works, answered prayers, and kindness in our life. We’re also prone to forget how bad our sin was, how empty our idol was and left us, or how much we needed rescued. The Bible tells us to be intentional about remembering and not forgetting.

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.” (Deut. 4:9)

“For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having *forgotten* that he was cleansed from his former sins” (2 Peter. 1:9; italics mine).

“The Devil doesn’t fill us with hatred for God, but with forgetfulness of God.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Idolatry is rooted in forgetfulness—forgetting what God has done for Israel. Fidelity is rooted in remembering.” Richard Lints

3. Remembering God’s faithfulness in the past is how we face trials in the present and the future.

Remembering what God has done in the past reminds us God will do so again today. The same God who helped us in the past is still our helper today. Remembering builds our faith and renews our trust. By disregarding God’s track-record, we ignore one of our greatest spiritual weapons against worry, fear, and discouragement.

“Then Moses said to the people, ‘Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place.’” (Ex. 13:3)

“If you say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?’ ¹⁸ you shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, ¹⁹ the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So will the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid...You shall not be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God.” (Dt. 7:17-19, 21)

“Gratitude exults in the past benefits of God and says to faith, ‘Embrace more of these benefits for the future, so that my happy work of looking back on God’s deliverance may continue.’” John Piper

“Your promise still stands
Great is Your faithfulness, faithfulness
I’m still in Your hands
This is my confidence, You never failed me yet
I’ve seen You move, come move the mountains
And I believe, I’ll see You do it again

You made a way, where there was no way
And I believe, I'll see You do it again.”³

4. Remembering is a “spiritual discipline” or “habit of grace” requiring intentionality to both record things today and recall things from yesterday.

In the Bible, remembering is an essential practice and rhythm of the people of God. God commands us to actively and intentionally store up things in our minds, in recorded words, in memorials and monuments, in our food and drink, and through festivals and special days.

Spurgeon wrote, “Memory seems to lie in two things: first, in retaining an impression, and then in recollecting it at a future time.”⁴ To do this it requires somehow having a record or history to draw from. While we do or can remember some things just through our memory, overall our memories are pretty weak and untrustworthy. That’s why we need to write it down, create memorial, anniversaries, and holidays to help us remember. One of the best things we could do is find some way to write down things we’re learning, answered prayers, God’s provision, faithfulness, mercy, or work in our life or in those around us.

“Remembering is a key verb of the Christian life. We recall our past, we correct our nearsightedness, we take heart, we regain mental strength, we find peace in the eternal Word. Remembering is one of the key spiritual disciplines we must guard with vigilance amid the mind-fragmenting and past-forgetting temptations of the digital age.” Tony Reinke

“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. 12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.” (Psalm 77:11-12)

5. Remembering is a powerful means of mutual encouragement and inter-generational discipleship.

Remembering is a great thing we can do together to encourage one another. If you’re in a small group or bible study, share with one another what God has done and is doing to encourage one another with how God is at work. Record not just prayer requests but answered prayers, and then later share how they were answered to strengthen your faith. Tell stories of how God saved you, provided for you, changed you, helped you, or proved himself in the past to encourage one another.

This is also a great means of inter-generational discipleship. That can include parents and grandparents telling their children and grand-children stories of God’s goodness or how God carried them through trials and suffering the past. That’s one thing parents can be doing right now is helping their kids process trials you’re walking through so one day they can look back and see God’s hand and kindness. But you also do this by sharing your own stories of the past of how God provided, protected, or delivered you.

But this isn’t just for children, but this is a key part of how older, more experienced Christians pass down the faith to younger, less experienced believers. I love hearing from older members at our

³ “Do It Again” written by Elevation Worship <http://www.worshiptogether.com/songs/do-it-again-elevation-worship/> accessed on 1/10/19.

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *The Practice of Praise* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1995), 20.

church of things they've seen God do in their life or how he was faithful through the many twists and turns of life. Their stories anchor us in God's faithfulness even if we have a shorter track-record.

"And Joshua said to them, 'Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, 6 that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' 7 then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.'" (Joshua 4:5-7)

"There is power in telling our story to our children. At the earliest age, our children can begin to hear parts of our story and to be eyewitnesses to how God is continuing to shape it. I love to tell my children aspects of my own faith story in the context of the age they are at that time." Michelle Anthony

Ways to Remember

- Find ways to record what God's faithfulness. Whether it's an answered prayer, a time of comfort, a way God provided for you or helped you, a season he sustains you through, something he teaches you in His Word, or a clear encouragement he brings into your life, you must record it if you ever want to remember it. Record things: prayer requests and answers, lessons learned, milestones, growth moments or seasons, struggles and failures, questions, conversations, etc. Use a notebook or the notes on your phone. Start a "memory jar" or faithfulness jar where you write these things on scraps of paper and then put them in a jar to pull out when you need them.
- Listen to stories of God at work and his faithfulness. Share such stories with others. Be quick to brag on God. Ask others about times God has been faithful.
- Learn from the history of the Church. Know God's works and faithfulness to His Church through church history, biographies, and stories. You can also learn how the Church has practiced remembering through the Church calendar and Liturgy.
- Celebrate holidays. Engage in the church calendar through seasons (Advent, Lenten season) and days (Easter, Pentecost, Christmas). If married, talk with your spouse as ways you can be more intentional with holidays, and the seasons leading up to them. Have times you look back and remember God's goodness and grace, whether it's the end of the month or year, an anniversary, or a birthday. Create some family or personal traditions to remember God's words or works to you.
- Don't be afraid to use physical objects as a memorial to remember truth or God's faithfulness in your life. Is there something you can put on your desk, or your bathroom sink, or in your family room that would be a personal reminder to you?

Questions

- What are some ways in your past you've seen God answer prayer, work in your life or someone's life around you, show up in a situation, help you grow or win a victory in a clear way,

teach you something, provide for a need, comfort with his presence, defend or deliver you, or speak to you through the Word?

- Have you drawn from these experiences in the past by remembering in order to sustain you at later points?
- How could you remember these things to encourage your faith?
- We likely cannot remember if we don't first see and notice, but also store up something in some way (whether in our memories, a journal, a picture, memorization, etc.). What are the ways you try to record things so that you can remember them? What are some practical ways you could do this?
- The Old Testament emphasizes remembering God, his words and works, from one generation to another. How do we pass on our faith and knowledge of God through parenting, discipleship, mentoring, evangelism, and other ways we might faithfully serve people?

Recommended Resources

- Things I've written: "[Wendell Berry and the Gift of Remembrance](#);" "[Three Dangers of Spiritual Forgetfulness](#);" "[Disciple Your Kids by Remembering with Them](#);" "[What Does it Mean to Remember Jesus in the Lord's Supper?](#)"; "[Your Church Needs More Time for Personal Testimonies](#);"
- Matt Chandler, "The Art of Remembrance" <http://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/the-art-of-remembrance>
- Remember His Goodness" <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/remember-his-goodness>
- *Treasuring God in Our Traditions* by Noel Piper
- **OT:** Ex. 3:15; 12:42; 13:3; 20:8-11 & Deut. 5:12-15; Num. 10:10; **Dt.** 4:9; **5:15** (15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22); 7:18-19; **8:1-2, 11-20**; 9:7; 16:3; 1 Chr. 16:12-18; Psalm 63:6; 77:3, 6, 11-12; 103:1-5; 105:5ff; 119:55; 143:5; Eccl. 12:1; Jonah 2:7.
- **NT:** Matt. 16:9; Luke 15:17; Eph. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:8; Luke 24:8; Jn. 12:16; 14:26; 15:20; 2 Peter 1:13.
- **Memorial Objects:** Gen. 28:18-22 & 31:45-48 & 35:14-15; Ex. 28:12; Joshua 4:7; 1 Sam. 7:12 (stones); Gen. 33:20; 35:14-15, 20 (pillars & tombs); Ex. 16:32 & 25:16 (manna & tablets kept in ark); Num. 16:39-40 (altar covering).
- **Festivals, Feasts, and Special Days:** Ex. 12:14-20; 13:3; Deut. 16:3; (Festival of Unleavened Bread); Ex. 12:42; Deut. 16:1 (Passover); Ex. 20:8-11 & Deut. 5:12-15 (Sabbath); Esther 9:18-28 (festival of Purim); Lev. 23:9-14 (Feast of Firstfruits); Lev. 23:15-23 & Deut. 16:9-12 & Acts 2:1 (Feast of Weeks & Pentecost); Lev. 23:23-25 (Feast of Trumpets); Lev. 16:1 (day of atonement; yom kippur); Lev. 23:33-43 (feast of booths).

⁵ The major festivals of Old Testament Israel were, in calendar order, Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles or Ingathering). <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/feasts-and-festivals-of-israel.html> Regular memorial days were the Sabbath and the feast of the new moon, with additional days being added in the post-exilic period (see Esther 9:18-28; Zech. 7:3).