

A Memorial Forever (part 1)

Not too long ago, I shared my thoughts about the benefits of moving from one place to another. I said that in moving from one place to another one can get rid of unnecessary stuff. But, here is something else good about moving. You can find things that you have been looking for a long time and you can also find important things you don't even remember having.

We moved to this area over a year ago. And, 17 months later we are still unpacking. Moving is not a one-day task. When you think you are getting close to being done unpacking, a box "shows up" behind a door. But here is something good that happened to me the last time we moved. I found a shoebox with some pictures that I did not even remember taking.

I took some time to dig inside the box and look at the pictures. I came across pictures from my childhood that my mother had brought with her from Cuba. I found pictures of some friends from Smithville, Ohio that we took while I was still in Cuba. I found pictures where I am sharing with the pastor who helped me when I was in Mexico. I found pictures of my early days here in the USA. While I was looking at all those photos a sense of gratitude took hold of me, and I could not help but to praise God for all the things that he has been doing in and through my life.

While I was going through these memories, I realized that these were more than photographs. These memories are obvious signs that prove God's love, faithfulness, and grace in my life. I do believe that more than pictures, these photos are tools that I can use to teach my children and my children's children about God's great faithfulness. I know that a shoebox is not the right place for my treasured memories. I believe that these photos can be turned into a memorial that will last forever.

There are times when I suffer from spiritual amnesia, even though I have experienced God's favor and protection in my life. Sometimes, I wonder if the Lord is truly by my side. I don't think that this is just me. I know that many of us share the same concern. On several occasions, I have seen how men and women of great faith struggled with this same question, "*Is God with me?*".

I find it hilarious how the Bible says: "*and the Lord was with Joseph.*" This is what is funny about it: the writer knows the Lord was with Joseph, we know the Lord was with Joseph; everybody seems to know that the Lord was with Joseph, **EXCEPT** Joseph. What I am trying to say is that we are not the only ones that forget how gracious the Lord has been to us. Joseph, Elijah, and other remarkable spiritual leaders had similar experiences.

At times, we are so focused on our present reality that we forget the goodness and mercy of God. This situation does not make us bad people, but it certainly makes life a little too difficult for us. When you don't remember the many blessings you have experienced you can be overwhelmed by problems; and a sense of desperation, hopelessness, and helplessness can take over your heart.

I believe that in order to live a life free of worries we need to focus less on the problems ahead and more on the victories behind. We can refer to the illustration of David facing the giant.

Most of us are very familiar with the story of David and Goliath. We know that a very skinny teenager defeated a well-trained and strong soldier who was also a giant. But, what really impresses me in the story is how David recalled all the times when he experienced God's deliverance before he faced the giant. Besides, after defeating the giant, the Bible says, "*David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem; he put the Philistine's weapons in his own tent.* **1 Samuel 17:54 NIV**

I wonder why David is taking Goliath's weapons with him. We can say that David kept the weapons as trophies of his great achievement. Or, we can say that for David these weapons were one more sign of God's deliverance and protection.

Personally, I prefer the idea that the man after God's own heart (David) was making the giant's weapons into a memorial that would last forever. David wanted to be reminded of God's provision and I guess that he needed reminders all around him.

If you need to be reminded of God's deliverance and protection, you need to surround yourself with memories that will bring to mind the times when God delivered you.

We have the tendency to forget what we need to remember and instead, we remember what we need to forget. Many times, we hold fast to the disappointments of life and we take God's blessings so lightly that we forget them all. This is the reason why we need to fill our houses, cars, and offices with those things that help us remember God's many blessings in our lives. It can be a Bible verse, the lyrics of a song/hymn, pictures, the report of a medical study, anything that reminds you of God's amazing Grace. The point is, you need to surround yourself with things that will trigger your brain to think about and reflect on God's presence in your life.

Dennis White was traveling from Chicago to Los Angeles on American Airlines flight 191. It was Memorial Day weekend of 1979. For some reason, he was late by only a couple of minutes. With his boarding pass in hand, he was not allowed to get on the plane because the gate had been closed two minutes before. Furious, Dennis was getting ready to present a complaint when he heard over the speakers that an airplane had crashed. It was the same flight he was supposed to catch. Dennis never presented his complaint, but he saved his airplane ticket as a reminder of the precious divine gift of life.

We heard this morning the passage that tells about the moment the Hebrew people were getting ready to cross the Jordan River. The Israelites were ready to enter a new season in their lives. This new stage in the history of the Hebrew people was marked by a jaw-dropping miracle. Like the Red Sea, the waters of the Jordan River were divided and the people walked through the river on dry ground. Joshua, the distinguished general and top leader of the Hebrew people at that time, ordered his folks to "*choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan.*" **Joshua 4:2 NIV**

Here is more from the story...

*So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to **take up a stone** on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you ...”* **Joshua 4:4-7 NIV**

It is important we understand what’s happening in this passage. Forty years earlier, the Hebrew people were at the point where they could start conquering the Promised Land. Yet, they decided not to cross the threshold from the wilderness to the Promised Land because of fear.

We all know transitions are difficult. Going to new places, starting new jobs, and establishing new relationships can be very scary at times. Being a parent for the first time can be exciting and also frightening. Sending your child to school for the first time can be terrifying. Taking advantage of new opportunities can come with lots of anxiety. Transitions can be life-giving and also life-draining.

I believe that God invites us to make memorials so we can navigate the transitions of life remembering God’s presence and power in our lives. The first function of a memorial is to inspire trust and confidence in the One who is leading us and holding our future. Memorials are a great antidote to boost courage and eradicate the fear of the unknown. Memorials have the purpose of reminding us that as God was in our past, God is in our present and also in our future.

The Hebrew people celebrated the Passover every year and the main reason for such a celebration was to remember what the Lord did on their behalf. The Bible says, “***This observance will be a reminder, like something tied on our hands or on our foreheads; it will remind us that the Lord brought us out of Egypt by his great power***” (Exodus 13:16 GNT). We need to learn how and what to remember, and memorials provide us space and content for us to do that.

God knows what to remember and what to forget. Of course God forgets. God wants us to know that “*He will forgive our wickedness and will **remember** our sins **no more***” (Hebrews 8:12 NIV). But, certainly God remembers. The Scripture says: *God is not unjust; **he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him...*** **Hebrews 6:10 NIV**

God wants us to remember, but he also wants us to forget. Forget your failures; remember the lessons you have learned. Eat the meat and spit out the bones. Let the bones remind you that God fed you with meat.

Here is the overriding message for today: **Don’t forget TO REMEMBER** the many times God has provided for you; the times God has brought healing, liberation, and restoration to your life. You need to remember the many ways God has blessed you, but you will soon forget if you don’t surround yourself with things that will trigger your brain to think about and reflect on God’s presence in your life. Stockpile some of the stones of the past, gather as many memories as you can and make out them into a memorial that will last forever.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Every time we gather at the Lord's Table, we do it to remember what Jesus has done for each of us. This is a time to celebrate and remember that the Lord brought us out of darkness to light, and out of death to abundant life. This is a time that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted as a memorial forever. As we come today to the Lord's Table, let us offer with humility our confession to God.