
Story Telling & the Value of Remembering

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"We reach for God in many ways.

Through our sculptures and our Scriptures.

Through our pictures and our prayers.

Through our writing and our worship.

And through them He reaches for us.

"His search begins with something said.

Ours begins with something heard.

His begins with something shown.

Ours, with something seen.

"Our search for God and His search for us meet at windows in our everyday experience. These are windows of the soul.

"But we must learn to look with more than just our eyes and listen with more than just our ears, for the sounds are sometimes faint and the sights sometimes far away.

"We must be aware, and all times and in all places, because windows are everywhere, and at any time we may find one. Or one may find us. Though we will hardly know it...unless we are searching for Him who for so long has been searching for us."

**From the back cover of Windows of the Soul by Ken Gire*

Remembering is one way to look through these windows. One way to see where we are as a result of where we've been. One way to recapture perspective. Remembering can bring joy or sadness, refreshment or regret. It requires a calmness and attention that have become foreign to most of us.

Story telling is the partner of remembering. To be complete, our memories must be told to others. Someone once said, "A great memory does not make a philosopher any more than a dictionary can be called a grammar." They need a context, an audience, an interpretation. This is the essence of story telling. That is how memories and stories can impact and move us when principles and prohibitions don't.

To quote the contemporary "theologian" Meatloaf,

*If life is just a highway,
Then the soul is just a car,
And objects in the rear-view mirror
May appear closer than they are.*

Meatloaf - "Objects in the Rear-view Mirror"

We can never escape our past, not should we. Even when we accelerate life to distance ourselves from our past, it always seems just a glance away. It's calling us to look back and ask:

*What is this saying to me?
What have I forgotten?
What should I be learning?*

Soren Kierkegaard said, "*Life must be lived forwards, but it can be understood only backwards.*" How we respond or react to the events of life shape who we become. C. S. Lewis learned this lesson through his wife Joy. She would often remind him that the pain of the present is part of the joy of what's to come. Her battle with cancer was the context for her perspective. Her unwavering faith was her interpreter. It is also true that the pain of the past is part of the joy we can experience presently. What we learn from our response to life's events later seasons the quality of who we continue to become. Sharing our stories is a heritage we pass on to others that keeps those lessons alive and provides a compass for the future. And our future redemption provides the richness and meaning of our stories.

Thoughts from the Scriptures:

I. Biblical Definition of Remembering

- A. Inward mental acts often accompanied by appropriate external acts (sometimes recited orally)
- B. Often related to God's promises or deeds. (Covenant, deliverance, etc.)

II. Biblical Examples of Remembering

A. Passover - Ex. 12:14ff.

B. Lord's Table - Jn.22:19; I Cor. 11

"When therefore Jesus said, 'Do this in remembrance of me' (I Cor. 11:24ff), he was assuredly not planning merely to keep before his disciples' minds that which they could anyhow never forget' it was to be a 'concrete remembering', a bringing back out of the past into the present - of what? Not of sins, for by his Sacrifice they are taken away. But of the Sacrifice itself, or rather of *Him*, crucified, risen from the dead, victorious through death."
(A Theological Word Book of the Bible - Alan Richardson, p. 143)

Note: In both the Passover and the Lord's Table, certain objects became part of the memorial. This can be true for memories God is presently building into our lives. (*Tell story about Mom and her spiritual influence...use ring to start)

C. Others -

1. Warning - "Remember Lot's wife" - Lk. 17:32
2. Appeal - "Remember me in your kingdom" - Jn. 23:442-43
3. Personal stories - valuable to the extent they are related to God's goodness to us.
*(*Helpful to relate memories to a specific character quality of God)*

D. What is memory?

1. Simply a mechanical (computer like) recording of all we experience or see?
2. A living, selective process, stored on the basis of meaning (bias)?

>I believe it is this second definition

>I also believe that we retrieve memories based on their meaning to us.

Examp. from research:

"The day after the space shuttle Challenger exploded, Ulric Neisser, a memory researcher, told his students to write down where they were and what they were doing when they first heard of the tragedy. Three years later, Neisser asked the students to answer the same question. One-third of them gave answers that were so far off from their original account as to be utterly unrelated to the facts they had recorded within 24 hours of the explosion. When shown their original accounts, many refused to believe their current memory was inaccurate."

Examp. from home: (Examp. from my dad and my marriage)

>Confidence does not equal accuracy!

III. Danger of "forgetting"

1. Types:

- a. Ordinary forgetting - simply the many things we don't remember.
- b. Personal forgetting - selectively forgetting some things and remembering

2. Results of these types:

- a. When discovered requires a sudden response
- b. Unnerves our confidence and sense of ability to navigate through life.

3. Why do we forget God?

- a. We don't guard our soul well - Dt. 4:9
- b. We don't tell our children the stories God has brought us through - Dt. 4:9
- c. We want something different than what God has promised - Dt. 4:23
- d. We don't keep his commandments - Dt. 8:11
- e. We become self-reliant - Dt. 8:12-17
- f. We don't listen to His voice - Dt. 8:18-20
- g. We forget who we are - Jas. 1:22-25

>Forgetting is at the heart of disobedience, idolatry, pride and destruction.

>It is a suppressing of memories in order to avoid God's call to keep Him

4. How do we do this?

- a. We run from experiences by questioning God's goodness!

Illus. - Man who was sure his wife would return to him because he felt that

God wo

"I once spoke to a man whose wife had left him for another man. This man was serene, confident his wife would come to her senses and return to their marriage.

At one point, I asked how he could be so sure. He answered, 'God would not let me suffer this way unless he wanted me to become a better husband for this woman. I know he will bring her back.' His confidence was not in a sovereign God; it was in how he believed God would work out this tragedy in his life. Simply put, he had made God into his own image. His 'construction' of God was an idol that he worshiped more than the God of the Scriptures who gave him no such assurance." (Dan Allender - Mars Hill Review, No. 2, May 1995)

>Refusal to bow to the true God equals forgetting God. (...allowing for a god that would bow to him and his view of how life should be.)

- b. We suppress a memory by turning from what is true to focus on a more appealing, and less demanding reality.

>Examp. Person facing possible eviction

- c. Dangerous pattern in suppressing the truth in our memories: Rm. 1:18-25

1. Knew God
2. Didn't honor God or give thanks
3. Foolish Speculation (*leading to a darkened heart*)
4. Professing wisdom (*in the midst of this foolishness*)
5. Made an exchange - True glory of God for a false image of man = God is

>Examp. - The Exodus!

* Circumstances lead to the same progression as in Rm. 1

* We forget God because to remember Him is to be stripped of our presumption of independence and control.

*"All memory is a story
and all story is a stage
where God whispers to us
to remember that we forgot."*

>Story telling is a Biblical and practical way to remember, *and to remember that we forgot.*

Story Telling Starters

>The following are some questions that can help you look into the rear-view mirror of life and remember. As you convert these memories into stories, you will come to know and be known in deeper and richer ways. And as you listen to the stories of others, may you find that you have many sturdy and thoughtful companions to accompany you through the joys and sorrows of your journey.

□ What would you like your tombstone (or eulogy) to say?

□ Tell us about one of the most influential people in your life?

□ When did God become more than a word to you? Who did God use to help you come to know the Lord?

□ What was one ambition or aspiration you had as a child?

□ What is one lesson you learned the hard way?

□ What is the best advice you were ever given?

□ How would you finish the statement, "You would know me better if you knew that I _____"?

□ What would you most like to be remembered for?

□ What memory from your youth brings back the warmest feelings?

□ Who were your heroes when you were in grade school? in high school? in early adult years? most recently?

□ If God would do anything you asked Him to do, what would you ask for?

□ What (or who) has the power to deeply excite or discourage you? and why?

Other possibilities:

> If you could spend an hour with any person mentioned in the Bible, (besides Jesus) who would you choose and why?

> What was your favorite book (or story) when you were a child? What did you like about it?

> What ability do you wish you had that you don't? Why?

> What is the one thing that gives you the most fulfillment?

A Prayer for Remembrance

Help me O God,

*To understand that when objects in the rear-view mirror appear larger than they are,
they appear that way not to intimidate me
but to get my attention.*

*Help me to understand that those images looming in my memory
are just trying to get me to stop, turn around, and go back to my past,
to pick up something that's back there,
something that is essential for the journey I am on,
something I need if I am to go on any farther.*

*Help me to remember the love I have received along the way,
and to be remembered for the love I have given.*

*Help me to understand how short that journey is,
and slow me down so I don't pass any of it by.*

*And if you grant me the grace of a long life,
grant me the greater grace
to always remember who I am
and who it is that loves me. . .*

A Prayer for Revelation

Please, God,

*Reveal to me through stories something of what it is like
to walk around in someone else's shoes.*

*Show me something about myself in the stories I read,
something that needs changing,
a thought of feeling or attitude.*

*Deliver me from myself, O God,
and from the parochial and sometimes prejudiced views
I have of other people, other nations,
other races, other religions.*

*Enlarge my heart with a story,
and change me by the characters I meet there.*

*May some of the light from their lives spill over into mine,
giving illumination where there was once ignorance,
interest where there was once indifference,
understanding where there was once intolerance,
compassion where there was once contempt. . .*

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