

Memories (Part 1)

Memories are indicators, reminding us where we've been, what we've experienced, and the faithfulness of God throughout our lives.

Memories are signposts, pointing us backward for remembrance and reflection so that we can then look forward to God in faith and anticipation.

Memories are not in and of themselves infallible or "stand alone." Truth, fact, and reality are all much more important. At the same time, memories are our recollection and impression of those events and realities.

Some memories seem to always be around, just under the surface, easily recalled. Others pop up out the blue, after not having been remembered or thought of for years.

It would be negligent to fail to point out that there are bad memories, awful memories, that constitute nightmares in our lives. These don't bring joy as do good, positive memories, but sometimes we can still learn from them. We can trust the Lord to heal them and to help us learn from them.

Memories can be faulty or false. My memory of Judy's nurse's cap, for example. The first time I went to see her in Missouri in 1970 after we started dating, I arrived at her house, and her dad took me with him to go pick her up. I used to tell people of seeing her come out of the doctor's office where she worked, so pretty with her nurse's cap on. She reminded me that she was not wearing a cap; I was remembering a picture of her in her nurse's garb on a shelf at home. I had conflated the two things and thus had a faulty memory.

Memories can have great value, even if we don't remember everything. While it's great to remember one's salvation experience – and many do in great detail – it is even more

important to know that today we are relying on Jesus' finished work on the cross, and are believing in and following him. It's not necessary to remember the date and all the circumstances.

God constantly reminded His people of His mighty workings on their behalf in the past and urged them to go back and recall His faithfulness. (Psalm 78 is a lengthy recall of what God had done in the life of Israel, and how the people still didn't obey and follow Him.) Psalm 77:11: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old." (Psalm 103:2)

So, with those foundational observations, some memories "from my personal storehouse." I've selected them as representative, and for their value as teaching experiences. Over time, I hope to do a couple more of these, that cover the years of my life. I'm convinced that memories can have great value as teachers.

1966 (I think that's the year.) "Who Am I?" Sunday morning service at my home church. I was 16. A group of young women, slightly older than me, was singing one Sunday morning, a beautiful song that was very popular during those years. As they sang "who am I that a King would bleed and die for, who am I that He would pray not my will thine for?," [1. Who Am I: Charles "Rusty Goodman" 1965] tears began to flow, and several of the girls totally lost it. In fact, they couldn't continue. The emotion spread throughout the church, as the Holy Spirit ministered to hearts. I think that some people came to the altar. Our pastor, as this went on for several minutes, realized he couldn't preach the sermon he'd prepared, but deftly and with wisdom, began to exhort and encourage the people. A tremendous memory indeed, one of many times when "God showed up" and blessed His people.

1968 Testimonies of enrolling college freshmen. Again, at my church. Again, a Sunday morning. This time, our pastor had asked those of us going off to college in a few weeks (it was

early August) to briefly share. I – the shy, inhibited one – was first. All I can say is that I poured out my heart, after spending hours going over what I wanted to say, and a Power greater than mine took over, and my testimony (exhortation) touched hearts in a way I couldn't have imagined. It may have been the first time in my life I had ever thought that God might somehow use me in the ministry as a preacher.

1977 First service in Panama that Judy and I led. John 4 the Samaritan woman and the living water Jesus gives. We had five people present – the Cáceres family, father, mother, and three teenaged daughters. I was nervous. My Spanish was not all that good, since we had just finished one year of language school, and had arrived in Panama only two months earlier. We put the chairs in a circle. Judy played the piano and led the singing. That was the small beginning of a church plant in Bethania, Panama City – quite a memory, indeed!

1982 Phillip's epiglottitis. I was on a trip to Panama's interior, about two hours from home. Up in Buenos Aires, there was no electricity and no running water. There was no way to keep in touch with Judy and the three boys. When I got home four days later, there was a sign on the door: "Phillip is in the hospital. Don't worry – he's much better. Come as soon as you can."

I rushed over to Paitilla Hospital to find Phillip in a hospital room under an oxygen tent. Judy explained that after I left on my trip, Phill had started running a high fever, and didn't seem to be breathing well; in fact, he was wheezing. After an entire morning of this, she grew very concerned and had a neighbor take him to the clinic for a 2:00 p.m. appointment. (I had the car.) The clinic was full that afternoon, but the receptionist realized Phillip was very sick and moved him to the front. Dr. Vásquez looked at him and said "I don't want to alarm you, but we need to get him in the hospital. I think he has epiglottitis."

In a matter of minutes, the doctor had diagnosed our son with something rather rare in Panama – an infection of the epiglottis – which led to its swelling and producing thick saliva. Phillip was slowly smothering to death. The doctor immediately started two antibiotics and ordered an oxygen tent to help Phillip's breathing. Unknown to Judy at the time, he spent that first night at the hospital, because of his concern, and to be able to monitor Phillip closely.

God was so merciful, and though I came into the picture "after the fact," my heart is no less grateful to the Lord for sparing our son. Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord our healer.

Memories...we all have them. Let's benefit from them.

Precious Memories how they linger

How they ever flood my soul.

In the stillness of the midnight

Precious sacred scenes unfold. [2. Precious Memories: J.B.F. Wright, 1925]