

Memories (Part 2)

As I continue to recall memories, I should point out that these are selective and representative. There are many more, but these stand out to illustrate the faithfulness of God in both good and bad times. (Read Part One [here](#).)

The Sweet Fellowship of College

“Yesterday, Today, Forever” was a medley of songs popular during my college years at the Free Will Baptist Bible College, [1. Welch College now.] that we dorm students would sing during informal gatherings. One evening, around 1970 or 1971, as the students frequently did, we’d gathered in front of the sliding curtain opening into the dining hall (where the student lounge and later “Common Grounds” were) about five minutes to six, and as was often the case, we started to sing:

Yesterday, Today, Forever Jesus is the same.

All may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!

Glory to His name, glory to His name.

All may change but Jesus never, glory to His name!

Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.

Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.

Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss

*Walking down streets of purest gold, living in a land where
we’ll never grow old.*

Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss

*I like Bible College down here, but Heaven is better than,
Heaven is better than*

Heaven is better than this.

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through

My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.

The angels beckon me to Heaven's golden shore,

And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

More, more about Jesus, more, more about Jesus

*More of His saving fullness see, more of His love who died for
me.*

It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer

It's me, it's me oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from
a world of care*

*And bids me at my Father's throne make all my wants and wishes
known.*

*In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found
relief*

*And oft escaped the tempter's snare, by thy return, sweet hour
of prayer.*

With a key word, one song would flow into the next:
name...name, Heaven...Heaven,

This...this, more...more, and prayer...prayer. That particular
night, though, as we approached the final song, there seemed
to be a holy hush, a sense of God's Spirit. The curtain came

open well before the end. The dining hall hostess stood there smiling. She didn't hush our singing and call for someone to ask the blessing right away. Instead, she joined us as we finished out the medley with the the beautiful and poignant "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and then we prayed and went into the dining hall to eat. A beautiful moment, a precious memory, which to me highlights the camaraderie, the sweet fellowship, the closeness of our student body during our unforgettable college years.

First Visit to Cuba

It was the summer of 1986. We had just come home from our second term in Panama to begin stateside assignment. Brother Eugene Waddell, who had recently been named as General Director of Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions, called me, and asked me if I would go with him to Cuba to be his interpreter/translator. I felt greatly honored to be asked to go. Over the years, we had met a number of our FWB people from Cuba who migrated to Panama en route to the United States. I'd heard so much about the country and the church there. In addition, visits from the US to Cuba were very infrequent, and no one from the Mission office had gone in nearly thirty years.

It was one of the most unforgettable weeks of my life. We were in Pinar del Río, at the site where the seminary had operated for almost 20 years up until the time of the Cuban revolution. Since that time it had been closed, and the government would not allow the seminary to reopen. Eugene Waddell spoke several times during the youth camp we were attending; the FWB Church in Cuba was still permitted to use the facility for camps and conventions. Never have I seen such anointing or heard such pertinent messages as those he brought that week. His messages from the book of Daniel, and how God used this young man and his three friends as witnesses in a

foreign, hostile culture, tremendously blessed and encouraged our Cuban brothers and sisters, especially the youth.

We laughed, we cried, we worshipped, and we forged friendships that would last for a lifetime and into eternity. There were also strategic discussions and the working out of a viable strategy for the Mission to again become involved in the life of the Cuban church, but in a healthy way that would honor our brothers and not create unhealthy dependency. What has resulted in Cuba these past 30 years owes much to the wisdom God gave to Bro. Waddell and Bro. Gilberto Díaz, who was president of the Cuban Association.

The 1989 US Invasion of Panama

Things had been hot and chaotic in Panama since 1987, when frequent demonstrations started taking place against the dictatorship that had ruled the country since October 1968. Then, in early 1988, the U.S. froze Panamanian assets in an effort to force dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega to step down, and charged him with drug trafficking and other illegal activities. Banks closed, and we had difficulty getting money to even buy groceries. Things calmed down a bit, but then in May, 1989, after Noriega had the presidential election annulled when it was evident that the opposing candidate had one, violence erupted, and images of Guillermo Endara and Guillermo "Billy" Ford beaten and bloodied by Noriega's thugs flashed across the television screen. The tension grew almost daily.

Judy shares the following memory:

Since public transportation was so difficult during this time, one afternoon, I decided to take our friend Lola to a bus stop closer to her house so she wouldn't have to wait for hours. We were chatting in the car as we arrived to the area called San

Miguelito. Suddenly, we were in the middle of a political demonstration. The traffic was totally stopped. I looked around. There was a river of cars in front of us, behind us and on both sides. The angry mob was shouting, "Kill the Gringos, kill the Gringos." There was no escape. The car had tinted windows, thank the Lord, because one protester approached my car and laid his AK-47 right on the hood and continued to shout! Lola was praying like there was no tomorrow and I was saying a few prayers myself. Just as suddenly as we found ourselves in this horribly frightening situation, it seemed like God parted the Red Sea. That river of cars opened up and I didn't wait to see if the traffic light was red or green. I gunned it and we were out of there safe and sound. Only God could do that!

There were a couple of coup attempts to have Noriega step down, which failed and resulted in Noriega's men being killed. October and November slowly went, the tension growing, and no one knowing what might happen. Noriega shook a machete in the face of the United States, and declared Panama to be in a state of war. It was now late December, Christmas season, stores crowded with customers and their Christmas merchandise.

December 20, 12:00 a.m.: My family and I – our three boys were there with us, ages 14, 12, and 8 – will never forget "Operation Just Cause." The bombing, the strong military presence for weeks that followed, the terrible Friday, December 22 following the Wednesday a.m. invasion; a day of looting as people ransacked the stores, including those nearby us, and carried things up the street in front of our house. Everyone was concerned that once the stores were wiped out, looters would start breaking into homes. That night, by common consent, believers set a time to pray and call upon the Lord for His protection. I'll never forget when the prayer time ended, at that very moment, we heard the first U.S. helicopters passing over the neighborhoods, and heard that a curfew had been instituted! We were able to sleep in peace, in

spite of the uncertainty. The next day, we saw the first troops, patrolling the city. Things began to quickly calm down.

Parents' Home-going

These memories, though separated by over 25 years, have special significance: the passing of our parents, their departing this earth on their Heavenly journey. My dad died in 1981, after a year and a half struggle with pancreatic and liver cancer. He was not quite 70, and I was only 31 when he left us. We are thankful he lived longer than the doctors' had predicted, and enjoyed several months relatively pain-free. Judy's mom, Lillian Hovis, left us in 1993, at age 68. She had taken care of Judy's dad, who had lived in declining health for some time, when she was stricken with pancreatic and liver cancer in 1992. In less than a year, she was gone. That left Judy's dad, who lived for almost three years after his wife of 46 years was taken. He passed in 1996, at home. My mom suffered from Alzheimer's for more than 8 years, before the Lord took her home in 2007.

These very selective memories, spread over a period of 30 plus years, show God's love, faithfulness, protection, and comfort. From a precious, unforgettable moment of fellowship and camaraderie, to the Holy Spirit's mighty working among believers in Cuba, to God's hand of protection during a time of uncertainty and danger, to His comfort as we said our earthly goodbyes to those we love, He was there!

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]