

“Good Memories Can Make People Good”

Psalm 105

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Memorial Day Weekend

Memorial Day and memories go together. More people will go to cemeteries this weekend than any other. Ceremonies will be held in every community in our nation remembering fallen soldiers. The President will place a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery and give a speech expressing gratitude for all that made the ultimate sacrifice defending our country.

I would be willing to say that a portion of your holiday weekend will be spent traveling to a cemetery, if only in your mind. I have used my imagination to walk among the tombstones at the Oak Grove cemetery where many generations of my family are buried, including my parents. One of my brothers emailed me to tell me that fresh flowers were placed on their graves Saturday. I am grateful for his attention to details.

Time spent in retrospect can be beneficial. As Ernest Dimnet has written, “We need to go over our knowledge.” However, it was Hawthorne who reminded us that it is better not to remember if it does not lead to constructive results. Remembering that leaves us with unresolved guilt or shame does more harm than good.

So, what are the constructive results that can accompany our memories? Why do we need to “go over our knowledge?”

In my opinion, memories become beneficial when they enable us to see how God has been at work in our lives, how others have helped us along our journey and inspire us to look to the future with a renewed commitment to do good. Let me explain.

Our memories should help us to see how God has been at work in our lives and motivate us to trust Him. In Psalm 105, David wanted his readers to see that a guiding hand had been at work in their lives, and that hand was God’s. Count the times the pronoun, “He” is used in this Psalm. Is there any doubt that God was in David’s thoughts continuously? No and he encouraged his people to actually trace God’s hand in their history, starting with the ancient covenant made with Abraham.

Let me encourage you to follow David’s lead. Travel down memory lane and list times when you were the recipient of God’s protection, provisions and guidance. Christians cannot too often remember good tidings and blessings. Each recollection will increase your faith and prepare you for the journey yet ahead.

I know of no better antidote to worry than counting your blessings. In counseling, I try to get anxious people to tell me three times in their lives when they worried the most. I ask them how they got through that ordeal. As they begin reconstructing the details, they see the hand of God supplying the guidance, provisions and protection they needed. Usually, I don’t even have to reassure them of His faithfulness. They figure it out on their own and learn to relax and trust Him anew.

Our memories should help us to see how other people have helped us along our pilgrimage and make us more grateful. One thing Psalm 105 did was to help David’s readers to see that many people were responsible for them being where they were. Figuratively, David and his contemporaries were standing on the shoulders of a lot

of people. They owed a great debt of gratitude to many that had taken a lot of risks and left the world better than they found it.

Our memories should help us to feel the same way. Do you remember the story I told around Thanksgiving about “Who packed your parachute?” Charles Plumb was a US Naval Academy graduate who flew jets in Vietnam. After seventy-five combat missions, he was shot down by a surface to air missile. He ejected and parachuted into the jungle. The Viet Cong captured him and held him prisoner for six years.

Years later, after being released and coming back to the States, Plumb was sitting in a restaurant when a man came over and said, “You’re Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft, Kitty Hawk. You were shot down.”

“How in the world did you know that?” Plumb asked. “I packed your parachute,” he said. “I guess it worked.” Plum assured him that it did and had it not, he would have died.

Plumb could not sleep that night thinking about this stranger. He wondered how many hours this sailor had spent at a long wooden table in the bowels of a ship carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn’t even know.

When Plumb lectures, he asks his audience, “Who has packed your parachute? Who has taught you much needed skills, broadened your mind, helped you find emotional healing or put you in touch with spiritual values? These are the people we owe our lives to.”

If your memories promote this kind of gratitude in you, then they are certainly beneficial.

Our memories should inspire us to be better people. Why did David want his people to remember God’s faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses? He wanted it to inspire them to be more faithful to God. He wanted their memories to lead to confession, repentance, thanksgiving and new commitments.

Why did David encourage his people to recall the sacrifices and faithfulness of their patriarchs? He wanted their memories to motivate them to continue their good works.

Memories of my parents and grandparents do that for me. The recollection of their words and deeds motivate me to be a better person. It’s not so much that I don’t want to disappoint them, but I want to build on the foundation they laid. I think one of the greatest mistakes I could make in life is to be handed such a strong foundation upon which to build a life of service and honor and instead of building a solid structure, place a tent on it, or even worse, nothing.

Yes, we do need to go over our knowledge and memories can be beneficial. I hope yours are. Allow them to be as you travel down memory lane this weekend.