

Remembering: Assurance, Hope, and Anticipation

by Chris Schoon, director of Faith Formation Ministries

Like many other people, I build reminders into my day. I attach sticky notes to the edge of my computer screen or workspace. I set an alarm on my phone to tell me when to get up in the morning so that I can deliver one of my kids to school or work on time. Most of my calendar events have a reminder notification set for 10 minutes before the event. On occasion I email myself a nudge to follow up on something the next day. Admittedly, I need help remembering all sorts of things. Maybe that's true for you too.

“Do not forget”

I find it interesting, then, that as Moses prepared God's people for life in the promised land, he returned repeatedly to the phrase “Do not forget.”

For example, in Deuteronomy 4:9, Moses urges the people: “Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.” Similar commands appear in Deuteronomy 6 and 8, where Moses warns the people not to forget God as they enjoy the material blessings God will give them in the new land. Somehow God understood that even after all the miraculous interventions to liberate them from slavery in Egypt, Israel would have a tendency to forget about God.

When we hear the whole story of God's people, we learn that in fact they *did* forget God and God's commands many times over. The pattern of turning away from and forgetting God—a pattern that runs from the generation after Joshua all the way through the generations of kings—culminates in exile for God's people.

Jeremiah picks up the judgment connected to this forgetfulness. “I will scatter you like chaff driven by the desert wind. This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘because you have forgotten me and trusted in false gods’” (Jer. 13:24-25). The command “Do not forget” becomes a central anchoring point for the story of God's people.

Invitation to Remember

While the warnings against forgetting God are clear, the invitations to remember are even stronger and more frequent in Scripture. For example, in Numbers 15:38-41 God gives Moses this instruction on how the Israelites' clothing can help them to remember God as their deliverer:

“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by chasing after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God.’”

Some of the psalmists add their own personal commitment to remembering the ways God intervened for Israel. For example, in Psalm 77:11 we hear the psalmist recalling how God performed miracles in previous generations: “I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.”

Several of the prophets add their own calls to remember God’s faithfulness and mighty works, including Isaiah. Anchored in the assurance that God will not forget Israel, Isaiah writes: “Remember these things, Jacob, for you, Israel, are my servant. I have made you, you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you” (Isa. 44:21-22).

And in Revelation 3:2-3, we hear in Jesus’ letter to one of the early churches, calling them to be revived by remembering the gospel that has been given to them: “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent.”

In this context we begin to see that **the faith practice of remembering centers our attention on what God has done in our lives, deepening our assurance that God is with us here and now, and expanding our hope and anticipation for what God will yet do.**

Four ways to engage remembering as a faith practice

Many of our engagements with the faith practice of remembering take place in our communal worship gatherings. But the biblical patterns point to how we can engage this practice throughout our lives. Here are four ideas that can serve as a springboard for imagining how we might practice remembering.

Recall the mighty acts of God in salvation history. Within communal worship settings, the sacraments of baptism and communion are primary examples of how we remember God’s faithfulness throughout history—and particularly in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Traditional baptism liturgies often reference God saving Noah from the flood and bringing Israel across the Red Sea and the Jordan River on dry ground. One of the more common phrases we hear when participating in communion is “Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of Jesus Christ was given for the complete forgiveness of all of our sins.” These practices of remembering remind us of who God is, what God has done, and who we are because of that.

Tell the stories of God’s faithfulness shown to previous generations. Psalm 145:4 tells of how “one generation commends [God’s] works to another.” Passages like Hebrews 11 model for us how paying attention to the stories of God’s faithfulness in previous generations can encourage our faith today. Our faith is nurtured as we read stories in Scripture and when we seek out the stories of people from generations before us. By listening to their experiences, including their doubts and struggles as well as their faithfulness in the midst of trying circumstances, we grow in our capacity to discern how the Spirit leads us into faithful living today.

Encounter the stories of God’s faithfulness in different cultural contexts. Peter’s encounter with Cornelius the Gentile shows how we need to experience the faith of people in other

cultures for our own faith to grow. As Peter saw the Spirit moving among Cornelius and the people gathered in his home, he said, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (Acts 10:34-35). Peter is clearly surprised how his knowledge of God grows when he hears Cornelius recall the story of his own interactions with God. By listening to people from cultural contexts beyond our own backgrounds as they remember their stories of God’s faithfulness, we grow in our knowledge and understanding of who God is and how God works in the world.

Recall how God has moved in our own stories. One of the ways we can practice remembering is to regularly retell the stories of how the good news of Jesus Christ has shown up in our own lives. Sometimes people have said to me, “But I don’t have a big dramatic story of being converted or of God changing my life in some radical way.” The point of remembering is not about having a dramatic story that can convince other people to follow Jesus. Rather, by taking time to recall the ways God has moved in our own stories, we nurture our own faith. In remembering how God has already been faithful to us—even in small, simple ways—we grow stronger in faith so that we are able to trust that God is with us in our present circumstances and that God will remain with us into the future, especially when our future seems uncertain and fearful.

Altogether, by engaging the faith practice of remembering, we grow in the assurance that our current global, cultural, communal, and personal realities are not the end of the story. Remembering what God has already done in salvation history, in previous generations, in other cultural contexts, and in our own lives helps us to anticipate how God will yet move so that we can live faithfully with hope today.

Engaging the Faith Practice of Remembering in Your Context

As you experiment with the faith practice of remembering in your own context, you are invited to take a look at the Remembering resources included in the [Faith Practices Project](#). We’d love to learn alongside you as you experience your faith growing through this faith practice. Please share your experiences with #CRCFaithPractices and tag us on Twitter (@crc_ffm), Facebook (@faithformationCRC), and Instagram (@CRCfaithformation).