

Remembering & Forgetting

What we remember and what we forget changes everything

Psalms 103

Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. 2 Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits-- 3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, 5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. 6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: 8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; 14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. 15 The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; 16 the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. 17 But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children-- 18 with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. 19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. 20 Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. 21 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. 22 Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, my soul.

The Bible regularly calls people to remember what the Lord has done in their lives and in human history, and occasionally it also tells us what we should forget. But for us, it seems too easy to forget what we should remember, and remember what we should forget. This study addresses these issues.



Things to do/ Questions to consider

To begin, here's a few *memory* questions to think about...

- Do you have a system for remembering future events coming up in your day/week/month ahead?
- When it comes to experiences from your past that have been important to you (eg significant events, personal interactions, milestones), what do you do to help you remember these things?
- Generally speaking, would you say you tend to think more about things coming up in the future or about things that have already happened?

1. Forgetting what we should Remember

Let's look at what the Bible has to say about what we should remember. We will use Psalm 103 as our main passage.

Read Psalm 103 (see text box)

+ Remembering God's involvement in our personal lives

Psalm 103:2 encourages us to praise the Lord and 'forget not all his benefits'. Verses 3-5 then describe some of those benefits, including: forgiving, healing, redeeming, crowning, satisfying and renewing.

- Think back to a significant moment where you sensed God positively impacting your life in some way. Reflect on this for a few minutes. How might it help us to regularly remember these type of moments?

- What gets in the way of us remembering these moments?

- What can we do to help us get better at *regularly* remembering what the Lord has already done for us?

+ Remembering God's involvement throughout all of human history

In Psalm 103:7-10 the big story of faith is remembered as the Psalm recalls the account of Moses discovering more about who God is and what he is like (*see Exodus 33:18-34:7*). The Israelites were regularly told by God to remember the Exodus story (*eg Deuteronomy 7:17-19; 24:17-22*). In the New Testament, Jesus' life, death and resurrection becomes the central story to remember.

- What things do you do to help you remember the Good News story of Jesus and his kingdom?
- Do you feel that what you do and how often you do it is enough to help keep the Christian story central for you as you live each day? If so, great! If not, what could you change?

+ Remembering that God remembers us

Psalm 103:13-18 tells us that God remembers we are dust. These verses then contrast the world - which will quickly forget us (v15), with the Lord - who keeps us in mind and in his love from everlasting to everlasting (v17).

- What difference might it make to how we live if we know we will be forgotten by our world but always remembered by the Lord?

"No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more"
Jeremiah 31:33-34

2. Remembering what we should Forget

Most of this study focuses on our need to remember, but there are also some things we should forget.

Read Isaiah 43:18-25 and Jeremiah 31:33-34 (*see text boxes*)

For further reading see also: Isaiah 54:4; 65:16-17

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past... See, I am doing a new thing! ...I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."

Isaiah 43:18-25

In these verses, the Lord makes a point of telling his people he will forgive and no longer remember their sins – not in terms of forgetting what happened, but rather in terms of eliminating the negative effects. As Psalm 103:12 also tells us, he will remove these sins from us as far as the east is from the west.

- What might be some of the harmful effects for us if we keep remembering our wrongdoings even after God has 'forgotten' these and forgiven us?
- What can we do to help us 'forget' our wrongdoings in the way the Lord has already 'forgotten' them?

Thought to finish

Too often we *consume* time in the way we consume other things. We 'use' the moment, and when that moment is over, we forget about it and move on to the next moment. True consumers! But we can get more than 'one use' out of our moments of time. Like an empty can of drink, we can recycle it! In normal language this is called 'remembering'. God has already done much in the world and in our lives and it is a great loss if we don't remember these things. But even when that happens, we can take heart knowing that, although the Lord forgets our sins, he will never forget us. We are engraved on the palms of his hands (*Isaiah 49:15-16*).