

Remembering to Learn, Learning to Remember

by Jennifer Wickham

The Way of Love: LEARN

Reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus' life and teachings.

"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." – John 14:23

Grant us so to hear [the Holy Scriptures], read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. – Book of Common Prayer, 236

By reading and reflecting on Scripture, especially the life and teachings of Jesus, we draw near to God, and God's word dwells in us. When we open our minds and hearts to Scripture, we learn to see God's story and God's activity in everyday life.

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In 2018 I celebrated my 50th birthday and marked the one-year anniversaries of both my father's death and Hurricane Harvey. These milestone events have caused me to inhabit a reflective space lately, and I've spent the last several months in a season of nostalgia. Sometimes out of the blue I find myself recalling names, faces, and events that happened years ago – many (but not all) of which I remember with great fondness. I wonder often how they all mixed together and turned me into the person I am today.

I've been surprised to realize how often my memories play like recorded movies. Some of the most powerful events may be from ten, 20 or 30 years ago, but each time the story in my mind unfolds the same way. I know every scene change by heart, and the set, characters, and soundtrack never change. The fixedness of my memory is familiar and somewhat comforting, and I trust that there are very few surprises or plot twists I have not already explored. I suppose that's one of the benefits of being both primary script writer and director of my memory movies.

I was recently introduced to David F. Ford's *Theology: A Very Short*

Introduction. In it, he suggests that one of the primary elements of good theological exploration is the “wise and creative retrieval of the past.” He writes, “It says a good deal about a thinker which aspects of the past are given priority . . . But how they are brought into the present with a view to the future is even more significant.” Since I was already in such a nostalgic frame of mind, I found this idea quite interesting. In particular, I thought about myself as script writer and wondered why I tell certain stories of my life in certain ways.

I am not, it should be said, speaking of the kind of intentional reflection that would happen during a theological reflection or conversation with a skillfull therapist or spiritual director. Rather, I am thinking of the seemingly mundane memories about the daily ins and outs of my life – those things which seem to be clear and without need of examination. I also generally think of myself as being quite good at asking God for input with current and future events, but it is all too easy to allow memories of experiences and interactions to get fixed and frozen in time. Once that happens, “wise and creative retrieval” is sometimes impossible. I think what I think. I remember what I decide to remember. I know what I allow myself to know.

The end result of this is that I limit God’s input into how I view my experiences. I can be prone to remember things without the benefit of other perspectives. It’s a helpful reminder, then, to learn about all things – what was, what is, and what is yet to be. Over and over we are directed in the Scripture to pursue learning. When we do this we grow in both knowledge and wisdom and, over time, become more like who we were created to be.

As with most things, a commitment to learning must be made with intention. While it can certainly happen on its own, there is nothing which replaces a daily discipline of study and prayer. We always tend to give more time to those things which are priorities for us, and without making a determined commitment we may find that our desires and practices don’t align. There are many ways to stimulate a commitment to learning: engaging in Bible study, enrolling in a class or reflection group, reading scripture regularly. What’s important is that we make the commitment and then – sometimes the hardest part! – we follow up on that commitment.

Consider what areas of your life would benefit from having more of God’s input. Where do your thoughts

and feelings seem to be stuck in familiar patterns? What relationships, attitudes, and experiences might God use to teach you something new? By inviting God’s instruction into every aspect of our life we open the door for new possibilities. New wisdom. New creativity. New healing. After all, we may not know as much as we think we do. About anything. Thanks be to God for that! *R*



For Reflection and Discernment

- What ways of reflecting on Scripture are most life-giving for you?
- When will (or do) you set aside time to read and reflect on Scripture in your day?
- With whom will you share in the commitment to read and reflect on Scripture?



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