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Remembering

When I shipped overseas during the Vietnam War, my most prized possession was a pocket-sized copy of my fiancé's senior picture. Whenever the hardness of my situation would overwhelm, I would gaze upon that lovely face to be reminded not only of the one I loved, but that there was a softer world back home in the States—a world without guns, without metal walls and floors, and without the coarse behavior of sailors stuck together in the middle of the sea.

There was not a chance that while I was overseas I was going to literally forget my fiancé. I was not going to forget that she existed, nor was I going to forget about her. If for no other reason, my yearning for her would not let that happen. But there was a chance that circumstances would conspire to dull my connection to her.

Loneliness can play tricks on the mind. That which is within reach can start to look better than that which is even momentarily beyond our reach. A healthy young man caught in the lunacy of war a long way from home can make poor choices based on the immediate availability of something of inferior worth. A sailor on liberty in a foreign port is like a kid in a candy shop: so many

sweet enticements that seem good, but will actually rot the teeth.

In that moment, the best way for me to remember that what I had back home was far superior to what was before me, was to keep looking at that picture.

Seeking Communion

Next to the front door of the small house in which I was raised hung a faded print of the Savior knocking at a closed door. It was an artist's famous and thoroughly inaccurate rendition of a European-looking Jesus acting out Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." That picture hung there for all of my growing up years. Over those years I may have learned how to ignore the picture with my eyes, walking past it without a glance. But my mind always acknowledged its presence, for even today, decades later, I cannot remember that front door without also seeing the picture of Jesus next to it.

There were times I went out that door to do something I shouldn't, or came in that door later than I had promised. There were times I went out it in anger. There were times I went out that door with thoughts anywhere but on Christ. But every time, there He was. I couldn't avoid Him. And even if I was off doing something I shouldn't (as is the natural proclivity of teenagers), always in the back of my consciousness was the image of a patient, gracious Jesus seeking communion with my heart. He was already my Savior; that picture was a daily reminder that He desired also to be my Lord.

An Inferior Substitute

The spirit may be willing, and have only the best of intentions, but the flesh is weak. Because we can forget, we need reminders.

Chances are very good that the Christian will not literally forget, or forget about Jesus. Even if the feeble gray cells of the human brain should fail, the believer always retains the persistent Spirit—that gracious Nagger. He is the permanent brand that marks each believer as belonging to Christ, and forever links our spirit to His.

But just as the war-lonely sailor can find solace in the arms of an inferior substitute for the sweetheart left behind, the Christian can gravitate toward more familiar and immediate temporal comforts, thus blunting the connecting work of the Spirit. After all, we are still people made of flesh, for whom "seeing is believing," and to those of us treading this muddy plane God the Father, Son and Spirit are still invisible. We are made of stuff that responds best to that which connects with our senses: hearing, smelling, taste, sight, and touch. Spiritually, we all hail from Missouri; that which we see with our own eyes, can hold in our own hands, or hear with our own ears carries greater weight than that which is imagined, or even believed. Faith is strong, but in the flesh-born believer it is an uphill climb for it to compete with whatever is here before our eyes, and within our grasp.

Kinship

*O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!*

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow
strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.*
(Helen H. Lemmel)

Sitting on a bookshelf near my desk is a picture of President and Mrs. Bush. This photograph is not a shrine, but a goad. Because George W. Bush is a man of character and grit, and because philosophically and politically he and I are kindred spirits, his image is a regular reminder for me to be a person of character, of determination, and grit. It would be impossible for me to forget that Mr. Bush is my president—especially in an election year! But the mundane rigors of life can dull my remembrance of his strong example. So my life profits by the simple goad of his image reminding me to be a person of good character.

Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

(Luke 2:46-47)

Nearby, hanging on the wall, is a print of a famous illustration of the young Jesus with the teachers in the temple. The original has been cropped to reduce out every other person except Christ. This framed print hung on the wall of my childhood bedroom, and remains with me even now. The image reminds me that my Lord was “born” here on earth, and went through the same growing up process as I. In the face of the youth, however, the artist has captured that mysterious conjoining of

flesh and deity: the expression is at once that of a boy wishing to go outside to play ball with his chums, and a beatific reverence for the law His Father had given His people. The old image emphasizes my kinship with Jesus: still flesh, yet, through Him, justified. It makes me love Him all the more.

and contemplate someone who walked the earth two millennia ago. It is history, it is religion—neither of which excite the modern mind.

Yet the modern believer owes everything he is and has to this one who graciously taps at the door, waiting for an invitation

inside for sweet communion.

It is an insult of the lowest order to forget about Him. Blessed Lord, forgive us our ennui, our lazy transgressions against Your Spirit, Your memory, Your selfless sacrifice—against You.

Jesus is the heart and soul of who we are. No other faith, no matter how noble or base, has such a Lord. He is the foundation of our standing, and the pinnacle of our aspirations. He is Lord! and it is at our peril that we diminish Him in our lack of remembering. Let the world fly by; it holds no attraction for the one whose heart is fixed on Jesus. It is vapor. It is made of crumbling dust. It is already dying.

But one who did die—once, but rose never to die again—longs to be remembered. He longs to spend time with the children He died to save.

“This do in remembrance of Me.” (1 Corinthians 11:24 kjv)

It seems then, that Christians may forget Christ! There could be no need for this loving exhortation, if there were not a fearful supposition that our memories might prove treacherous. Nor is this a bare supposition: it is, alas! too well confirmed in our experience, not as a possibility, but as a lamentable fact. It appears almost impossible that those who have been redeemed by the blood of the dying Lamb, and loved with an everlasting love by the eternal Son of God, should forget that gracious Saviour; but, if startling to the ear, it is, alas! too apparent to the eye to allow us to deny the crime. Forget Him who never forgot us! Forget Him who poured His blood forth for our sins! Forget Him who loved us even to the death! Can it be possible? Yes, it is not only possible, but conscience confesses that it is too sadly a fault with all of us, that we suffer Him to be as a wayfaring man tarrying but for a night. He whom we should make the abiding tenant of our memories is but a visitor therein. The cross where one would think that memory would linger, and unmindfulness would be an unknown intruder, is desecrated by the feet of forgetfulness. Does not your conscience say that this is true? Do you not find yourselves forgetful of Jesus? Some creature steals away your heart, and you are unmindful of Him upon whom your affection ought to be set. Some earthly business engrosses your attention when you should fix your eye steadily upon the cross. It is the incessant turmoil of the world, the constant attraction of earthly things which takes away the soul from Christ. While memory too well preserves a poisonous weed, it suffereth the rose of Sharon to wither. Let us charge ourselves to bind a heavenly forget-me-not about our hearts for Jesus our Beloved, and, whatever else we let slip, let us hold fast to Him.

(Charles Haddon Spurgeon)



Foundation and Pinnacle

We may love Jesus Christ, but our attentions can easily be distracted from Him. In a time of cell phones and satellite TV and computers, the things of Christ can seem rather organically quaint. Today life is made of chromium and plastic; it moves forward at a blinding pace, and few people choose to slow down long enough to remember