

Never Forget!

Rich Nathan
May 25 & 26, 2019
Memorial Day Weekend
Ephesians 2:11-14

This weekend, America is commemorating Memorial Day which is designed to remember and honor those who have died while serving in the U.S. military. The holiday started being celebrated right after the Civil War to remember the more than 600,000 American soldiers who died – more than in all of our other wars combined. Today, volunteers often place flags on each grave at U.S. military cemeteries.

Many families also used the day to visit cemeteries where loved ones are buried to remember their lives and place flowers or some other tokens on their graves. In Westerville, the Westerville Rotary Club sets up a Field of Heroes with 3,000 American flags for community members to honor their personal heroes – family members, a member of the armed forces, a teacher, a police officer or whoever.

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Westerville pic

Countries around the world celebrate Days of Remembrance. England and the Commonwealth countries commemorate Remembrance Day on November 11 each year – the day World War I ended. The English wear poppies.

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Poppy photo

Which were a common sight on the western front as they grew from the churned up ground on battlefields. The poppy was the inspiration of John McCrae's famous war poem "In Flanders Fields".

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In Flanders Fields
BY JOHN MCCRAE

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

To me, the most moving day of remembrance is celebrated in Israel each year to mark Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, is a day set aside so the world will never forget the 6,000,000 Jews who were murdered by the Nazis in World War II, and for people to hear heroic stories of survival and to appreciate the compassion of those who rescued Jews in Europe.

The entire country of Israel comes to a standstill at 10:00am as a two minute siren is sounded all across Israel.

Video
Yom HaShoah

Of course, the slogan of Holocaust Remembrance has for decades been:

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Never Forget!

It was often heard in the days following the terrorist attacks on 9/11. It was a call for America to unify, to come together, in response to the terrorist attacks.

Do you know that Christians are called to cultivate good memories? In fact, not forgetting is one of the major keys to our spiritual growth. Week by week, followers of Jesus celebrate communion with the bread and the cup and all over the world in all different denominations, we repeat the words of Jesus –

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Do this in remembrance of me.

This Memorial Day weekend, I wanted to offer each of you a word of encouragement in a message that I've titled, "Never Forget!". Let's pray.

Slide Ephesians 2:11-14

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

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The call to never forget

Two times in this text, Paul says, "Remember". The secret to spiritual growth in the Bible is learning to cultivate a good memory. 166 times the Bible commands people to remember, to never forget. We read this in Deuteronomy:

Slide Deuteronomy 5:15

¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

And regarding the Passover, we read this in:

Slide Deuteronomy 16:3

³ Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste—so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt.

Slide Ecclesiastes 12:1

Remember your Creator

in the days of your youth,
before the days of trouble come
and the years approach when you will say,
"I find no pleasure in them" —

The constant problem of the Israelites in the Old Testament that causes them to backslide and fall into apostasy was that they always forgot. Here's what we read:

Slide Deuteronomy 4:9

⁹ 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.

In the book of Judges, the Israelites kept forgetting the Lord and kept turning to other gods. We read about what their fundamental problem was:

Slide Judges 3:7

⁷ The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs.

The psalmist sums up the problems of the Israelites this way:

Slide Psalm 106:7

⁷ When our ancestors were in Egypt,
they gave no thought to your miracles;
they did not remember your many kindnesses,
and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.

Slide Psalm 106:21

²¹ They forgot the God who saved them,
who had done great things in Egypt,

So the book of Psalms gives us the key to spiritual growth and the Christian life in Psalm 103:2

Slide Psalm 103:2

² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—

Never forget! It says twice in Ephesians 2:11-14 “remember”!

Let me drop this down for you. One of the major obstacles that you and I have in growing spiritually and becoming strong followers of Jesus is that we have incredibly short memories. We get burned by making a disastrous decision in our relationships. For example, we date outside of the Christian faith. Or you let a dating relationship get more physical than you know that you should. Or you hook up with a certain type of person who turns out to be a loser. The short of it is that there are different ways that we get burned romantically and we experience great grief as a result of the relationship. We lose sleep. We feel awful. We feel torn up for weeks with self-accusation. How could I be so stupid? How could I let this happen? What was I thinking?

So, we fall all over yourself repenting and you swear to God, “Never again. I’ve learned my lesson. Never again! Not that activity. Not that sin. Not that kind of relationship. I’m never going to do that again.”

Here’s what happens. After a few weeks you start feeling good about yourself again. Your self-esteem grows. You find yourself making good choices. You engage in Christian fellowship in a closer way. You are regularly showing up for church. You are even beginning to read your Bible and pray. Life feels right – for a month, for three months, maybe even six months.

And you think to yourself – for the first time in years I feel free! I feel peace! I feel clean! You know what I need? I need to hook up with another loser who will shred my self-esteem and make me feel like dirt again. I need to find some guy – and I’m speaking to women now – who will make me feel like dryer lint. I need to return to the habit that has always dragged me down. I need to get back together with the person who always abused me!

Kerry Davis, one of our Vineyard pastors here on staff, said to me recently,

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A wise person is just a fool with a good memory.

In other words, we’re all fools. We’re all easily fooled by doing the same thing over and over again. A wise person is a fool who doesn’t forget. It’s not that we become different people, we just start cultivating a good memory.

You know, the enemy always wants you to forget. Satan’s goal is always to seduce you into not thinking deeply. A lot of people believe that to become a follower of Jesus or to grow as a follower of Jesus, you basically have to sever your head from the rest of your body and not think. A lot of people accuse Christians of not thinking. But I believe that it’s exactly the opposite. I believe that the only way to have a deep relationship with God is to think deeply about your life. Not just skim along the surface, but to think deeply about your life, about ultimate questions about God.

Listen, there are no more fundamental questions that you could ask or answer than “is there a God? And if there is, do I know God?” Nothing is more basic than “Is there a God and can we know him?” We spend more time evaluating our cell phone plan and what service we’re going to use to stream movies into our home than we do looking into whether there is a God and how we can know him.

The enemy always comes along and says - Don’t think about it. Don’t think about the really big questions of life. They’re too hard to figure out! It takes too much mental energy to discover what’s true and what your purpose is in life. Don’t think too long

about the consequences of your bad relationships and addictive behaviors. Don't call to mind the prayers in which you cried out to be set free. Don't rehearse the pain you've suffered as a result of your sin. All that stuff is too depressing. It's too hard to think about. Move on. It's the always the enemy who says Move On, just skim the surface. Do what comes naturally. Go with the flow – don't swim against the current.

Satan says, don't think. Do the easy thing. Push that snooze alarm! Go out tonight instead of studying! Pull out your credit card. Forget about the debt you're running up! Hop into bed with your girlfriend or boyfriend! Don't think about what God says. Don't think. Don't remember.

But God says to you and me: "Never forget!" 166 times the Bible says, "Remember"!

Here's the question:

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How can we never forget?

The Bible has a number of ways for us to never forget. I'll mention two of them today – writings and rhythms. Let's take these in turn. Never forget...

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Never forget through writings

Here's what we read in Exodus 17:14:

Slide Exodus 17:14

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "**Write** this on a scroll as something **to be remembered** and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven."

Here's what we read in

Slide Deuteronomy 6:6-9

⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ **Write them** on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

I strongly believe in posting writings around our homes and offices to assist our memory. For 43 years Marlene and I have a scroll that was given to us on our wedding

day by a friend. The simple written out parchment from Ecclesiastes 4. You know the verses.

Slide Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

⁹Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
¹⁰If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.

We have a sign by our front door from martyred missionary Jim Elliott that reads,

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He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. – Jim Elliott

We have a sign by our coffee pot that reads:

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In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus.

How about posting an especially meaningful verse or saying from scripture? Put it in a prominent place where you will see it so you will never forget lessons the Lord wants to speak to you.

I write things down that I want to remember. I have a little journal that I use when I read my Bible in the morning. Never forget through writing.

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Never forget through rhythms

The Bible records daily rhythms. Daniel prayed three times a day. Orthodox Jews still do that to this day. 2,500 years after the prophet Daniel, Orthodox Jews still pray three times a day.

The Bible records weekly rhythms. Every week there was a Sabbath day to rest and to worship God and to be refreshed. And the Bible records yearly rhythms. The great pilgrimage feasts of Israel – Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacles. And the other holidays – the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets.

Are there rhythms to your life? Do you have rhythms that enable you to live a spiritually healthy life, a relationally healthy life – daily, weekly, yearly? I can tell you that before I do almost anything, on a daily basis I spend time with God. Taking in his Word. Writing

in my journal. Taking time to pray. We eat dinner together as a family and say a blessing before we eat. Weekly, I do a date night with my granddaughter, Naomi. I did the same thing with my kids. Just some alone time to talk away from our home. Marlene and I have a date every week. We've been doing that for decades.

Some families have movie night on a weekly basis. Pizza night. Yearly, perhaps you have Advent or Christmas or Lenten or Easter traditions. Writings and rhythms help us to never forget.

But let's consider now the question:

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What should we never forget?

The Apostle Paul says

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Never forget where you came from

Slide Ephesians 2:11-12

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Have you ever heard someone say something like this? "That boy doesn't remember where he came from. He's so full of himself. He's so stuck up. He's so selfish. Look at who he's hanging around with now. He makes so much money and he doesn't give back to those in need. He doesn't remember how many people in our community helped him along the way, how poor he was, how he got a helping hand that gave him an opportunity. How many folks from our community, how many of our teachers, how many folks in our church helped him along? He's forgotten his past. He's forgotten his roots. He's forgotten his friends. The problem is that he doesn't remember where he came from."

Paul says: Remember where you come from.

Slide Ephesians 2:12

¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

You know, the Bible says there's really only one fundamental distinction between people. It has nothing to do with politics or economics or sexual orientation or race or country of origin or whether you are for or against Donald Trump. The Bible says that the only thing that really matters is whether you are in Christ or apart from Christ. Every other line we draw between people is like a hairline crack in the sidewalk compared to the Grand Canyon sized divide that exists between being in Christ and being outside of Christ.

The big distinction between people is not whether you live in a 7,500 square foot mansion in the suburbs and someone else lives under a bridge or whether you have a PhD and someone else doesn't have a 6th grade education. There's one dividing line that runs through the whole human race and that is: are you in Christ or are you apart from Christ.

The book of Ephesians is about being in Christ. The Apostle Paul begins the letter this way:

Slide Ephesians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

What does it mean to be "in Christ"? The Apostle Paul is not using these words spatially – like you are in a house with your family when you are all together around the dining room table or your clothes are in your dresser drawer or in your closet. To be "in Christ" is not to be located inside of him, but rather to be united with him in the closest possible relationship. To be in Christ is to be in union with Christ.

To be in Christ is to have a deep, personal intimacy with Christ. What does it mean to be in Christ? Jesus describes it as being like a branch united to a vine. Paul says it's like a limb being united to a body. He says it's like a husband being united to his wife. It's a personal, intimate connection, a deep union. To be a Christian is to be in Christ.

This makes Christianity unique among the world's religions. No other religion says that its followers are in personal union with the founder of the religion. Buddhists don't say that they are "in Buddha", that they have a personal intimate relationship with Buddha. Muslims don't say that they are "in Muhammad", that they have a personal intimate relationship with Muhammad. Marxists don't say that they are in personal, intimate relationship with Marx or Mormons don't say that they are "in Joseph Smith", that they have personal union with Joseph Smith. But that's what a Christian says about Jesus – that we are right this moment in a vital, life-giving personal union with Jesus. That's what it means to be saved.

Can you say that about yourself? I remember where I came from. I remember that I was apart from Christ. I was not in a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus. Nothing is worse than that. The Apostle Paul goes on to underline our state apart from Christ. In the famous words of William Hendriksen,

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We were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and godless.

But Paul doesn't leave us in that state. He goes on to say,

Slide Ephesians 2:13

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Let's consider this verse by considering first what it means to be "brought near". In other words,

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Never forget where you are now

I think this phrase "brought near by the blood of Christ" deals with one of the great objections that people have to Christianity. I have often heard people say, "Here's my problem with Christianity. I know someone who is not a Christian who is a nicer person or a more loving person or a more honest person than many Christians that I know." Have you ever heard someone say that? I know people who are just as nice or nicer than many Christians.

Have you ever heard somebody ask that? If you are a thoughtful Christian, you ought to respond, I've experienced exactly the same thing. I've seen wonderful people who are not Christians and I know Christians who are not so wonderful. But you see, Christianity is fundamentally not a moral improvement program. If you become a Christian, your morals should improve. You should over time become kinder and more loving and more welcoming and more honest and so on. But, Christianity is not primarily a moral improvement program. Christianity is not "I used to be a bad person, but now I'm a good person." Rather, it's "I used to be far from Jesus, but now I'm close to Jesus."

Christianity is primarily a relationship. It's not about moral improvement. The big change that happened in my life when I became a Christian is that now I have a relationship with the most incredible person ever, Jesus Christ. And I didn't have that before. It's all about relationship. Let me offer one simple analogy: imagine if someone said, "You know, there's no difference between being single and being married. You talk about how wonderful being married is, but I know a lot of single people who are more honest, more loving, more kind than married people." To which you would

respond, “Absolutely! I know the same thing. Marriage is not primarily a moral improvement program. Marriage is about entering a lifelong relationship with another person. It’s all about a relationship.”

You hope your relationship will change you. You hope that your relationship will make you kinder and more loving. Let me ask you a question, friend. Have you entered a relationship with Jesus? Is this your understanding of being a Christian? Being a Christian is not a matter of my politics or my traditions or even primarily a matter of my morals. Being a Christian is about growing in my relationship with Jesus.

Let me finish with this thought:

Slide Ephesians 2:13

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

One of my favorite authors, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, was a heart surgeon who became a preacher in Westminster Chapel in England. He preached a whole message on this little phrase, “But now”. Dr. Lloyd-Jones said that the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian can be summed up in one little phrase, “but now”. This phrase, he said, is the contrast between someone who is not yet a follower of Jesus and a follower of Jesus. Everyone in the world can say, “I have known sickness. I have known difficulty. I have known loss. I have known heartbreak. I have known guilt.” Everyone can say that. And if you can’t, I guarantee that at some point you will be able to say it. But only a follower of Jesus can say, “but now into my darkness, light has come”, “but now into my guilt, forgiveness has come”, “but now into my depression, hope has come”. These two words “but now” distinguish a follower of Jesus from someone who is not yet a follower of Jesus.

Let me ask you a question. Do you see a “but now” in your life – a turning point, a clear contrast between before and after? Can you say, “I used to be apart from Christ. But now I’m near Christ. I used to be outside of Christ, but now I’m in Christ. I used to be outside God’s family, but now I’m in God’s family. I know that I’m one of God’s children.”

Friend, can you say that clearly there’s been a “but now” that’s happened in your life? Never forget where you came from! But now, never forget where you are because of Jesus Christ!

Let’s pray.

Never Forget!

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Ephesians 2:11-14

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