

# “The Things We Remember”

Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 12:28-31 <sup>1</sup>

Memory is a precious possession. In fact, it seems to me that memory may well be more precious than eyesight. Someone has noted that “**We ARE what we Remember.**”

Last week was a trip down memory lane for Jill and me. Both of us grew up in Atlanta—the house you see here is the house in which I grew up—and the mountains of western North Carolina have been anchors for our spirits during the nearly forty-seven years of our marriage. We had our honeymoon in Boone, and we have vacationed in those mountains more years than not since; so last week’s trip through the Cherokee, Pisgah, Nantahala and Chattahoochee National Forests was renewing on many levels.

Not only might it be said that “we are what we remember”; but one of my pastor friends is fond of encouraging folk to “**Give your Children Memories worth Having.**” That’s what this Father’s Day sermon is going to be about.

You probably know that the word, “remember,” is actually sort of a compound word. What it means is to “re-member,” or to “join together once more.” That’s what we’re doing when we “remember” things. We’re joining disparate parts of our life experience into a coherent whole, a whole that tells a story.

Many communion tables have the words, “This Do In Remembrance of Me” inscribed on them. Those words come from Jesus’ instructions to His disciples at the Last Supper,<sup>2</sup> and they remind us to “join together once more” the meaning of Jesus’ Death & Resurrection for our present-day lives. The words also remind us to “join together once more” our own lives, one with the other, as fellow “members” of the Body of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

On this COVID Father’s Day, it probably goes without saying that parenthood, whether as father or mother, is life’s most sacred responsibility, pregnant with possibilities for life’s greatest joys and for life’s greatest sorrows. Parenting is a supreme privilege, even in such days as these, indeed, precisely because these days are as they are, because parents make the difference.

We parents are the primary teachers of our children, for better or for worse, whether we want to be or not. It’s fearsome to realize that how our children experience us determines in large measure their first images of God. In the formative years in which the die is cast, the twig bent, and the neurons connected, we parents have virtually unlimited opportunities to shape the lives, hearts, minds, and spirits of our children—if we take them.

And that’s the key for us as fathers: if we take them. Our wives understand these things much better than we do, guys. You and I tend to occupy ourselves with our work and with “manly amusements,” biding our time until our children are old enough to teach about hunting or fishing or sports, and ducking many of the opportunities we have to shape their young lives. I know this from observation, from research reports . . . and because I did it, too.

Guys, our children begin developing their life values—those core principles that will anchor and guide their lives—from their first breath onward.<sup>4</sup> The ways in which even our very

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on June 21, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Father’s Day.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 22:19

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-30

<sup>4</sup> I would suggest that we actually begin such development at conception. A mother’s lifestyle during pregnancy has significant predisposing power toward later lifestyle—bad habits such as smoking, drinking, or using other drugs having perhaps more effect than more positive pursuits.

small children spend their time is not morally neutral. We may not have to protect our families from the same threats and enemies that early settlers did, but threats and enemies still exist, more powerful and insidious than anything that was in these woods 250 years ago.

I'm a big fan of technology, as you know, but technology can be one of our greatest enemies in fathering and protecting our children. It used to be that monitoring television was our greatest challenge. Now the purveyors of perversion find access to our children through videos, movies, DVDs, cell phones, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Spotify* and *Instagram* . . . there's just no end to it, nor will there be.

Our families are literally flooded with value systems from outside the walls of our homes. Some of those value systems are our allies, but some of them are our enemies. A battle rages at this very moment for the hearts, minds, and souls of our kids, and we dare not ignore it.

Guys, even with all these electronic influences, it's as true today as it ever was that "faith is more caught than taught," and our children have an unnerving ability to discern the moral values that really guide our lives. They watch us, and who we are is inescapable, no matter what we say. If we don't practice what we preach, our children may parrot our preaching, but they will copy our practice.

What we do and who we are as fathers affects both who our children are today and who they will become tomorrow. *Let us beware lest we teach them things that they will later have to unlearn if they're going to become like Jesus.*

As you probably noticed, the **Great Commandment** and the **Great Commission** are our texts for this Father's Day morning. Jesus told us that the Great Commandment is the organizing principle for our relationship with God. The Second Commandment, to "love your neighbor as yourself," is the organizing principle for our relationship with other people. And the Great Commandment gives us the marching orders for our lives.

If we take these Commandments and this Commission together, we come up with Four Key Points by which to order our lives:

1. **Love God**
2. **Love Neighbor**
3. **Go into the World**
4. **Make Disciples**

From these Four Key Points come "the Five Things Disciples Do Every Week," which you see and hear about all the time around CBF, because this is how our congregation is organized:

### **FIVE THINGS DISCIPLES DO EVERY WEEK** to accomplish these **FOUR THINGS**:

1. **WORSHIP** (*Love God*) We covenant together to **participate** in at least one corporate worship service every week.
2. **CONNECT** (*Love your Neighbor*): We covenant together to **participate** in at least one face-to-face spiritual accountability and study group every week.
3. **GROW** (*Love God*): We covenant together to **practice** daily personal time in prayer and in the Word as well as the regular discipline of stewardship of our resources.

4. **SERVE** (*Teach Disciples*): We covenant together to **use our gifts and abilities to build up the Body of Christ in at least one way every week.**
5. **GO** (*into all the World*): We covenant together to **live in the world in such a way that we engage in some sort of Great Commandment or Great Commission activity every week.**

As Rick Warren famously put it, “A Great Commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission will grow a Great Church,” and that’s what we try to do each and every week.

Well, having said all this as prelude, let me return to the idea of re-mem-bering on Father’s Day. Since it has occurred to me that this may well be my last formal “Father’s Day sermon,” I’m going to re-mem-ber some things today about my own Dad, using WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP, MINISTRY and MISSION to organize my thoughts.

Before I begin, I invite you to re-mem-ber something—or several somethings—that need to be joined together once more in your memory about your own father on this Father’s Day. Some of your memories may be silly. Some of your memories may be painful. Some of your memories may be joyful. And all of your memories are sacred. Let’s re-mem-ber together.

**WORSHIP** was a big deal at our house. We worshiped together every night in family devotions, and we were at church every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, every Wednesday night, and any other time something special was going on. There were no circumstances, no excuses, no guests, no *anything* that kept us from worship. I could probably count on one hand the times my parents ever missed church when they weren’t sick . . . and that counts being out of town on vacation, too.

As I’ve told you before, I loved being in worship with my Dad, although my Dad couldn’t sing. He couldn’t follow a melody, and in some dimensions of life, we kidded him about his efforts—but not in worship. I always love to sing in worship; but the person I most loved to sing beside was my Dad. No, he didn’t get the notes right; but he made “a joyful noise” to the Lord<sup>5</sup> from the depths of his soul that nearly always moved me to tears with the sheer holiness of it all.

Guys, I doubt that any experience does more to communicate our values and plant strong spiritual seeds in our children’s lives than leading them in family worship as their fathers. If walking with God really is the highest priority of our lives, then our family activities and schedules will reflect that priority. My friend, Dwight Moody, whose writings you have occasionally seen in my *Laptops*, wrote a little poem about such family worship when his sons were small:

When Daddy prays, the house gets still. His voice is low and deep.  
We shut our eyes, the clock ticks loud, so quiet we must keep.

When Daddy prays he doesn’t use those words the preacher does.  
There’s different things for different days, but mostly, it’s for us.

He prays that we may be good boys, and later on, good men.  
We just squirm and think we won’t ever fuss again.

His prayers are awfully long and hard to understand,  
So I just wiggle way up close and let him hold my hand.

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 100:1

I can't remember all of it, I'm little yet, you see.  
But this one thing I won't forget: my Daddy prays for me.

My Dad was committed to WORSHIP, and he was also committed to **FELLOWSHIP**—to being in a prayer and accountability group with other men. My Dad participated in a weekly early morning men's prayer group literally for decades, and whenever I was in town, he took me with him. Those five guys prayed for me through years of spiritual wilderness as well as in happier times, and I've been in such a group for years myself, partly because I saw how important it was to my Dad.<sup>6</sup>

My Dad was also committed to **DISCIPLESHIP**—to growing in his knowledge of the Lord. Some years ago I had occasion to correspond with Dr. Sam Eerdman of Eerdman's Publishing Company in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I told him that one of my earliest memories as a child was looking at the small burgundy commentaries Dr. Eerdman's father had written on the Scriptures that my Dad kept and used on his desk.

My Dad had no formal theological training, but he was a serious student of the Word, and he read his Bible every day. He never missed Sunday School or any special training events that the church offered, and he was for many years the director of a young adult Sunday School department.

That brings me to the idea of **MINISTRY**, or using one's gifts to build up the local Body of Christ. My Dad's family didn't go to church much growing up, and I don't know how he got started going, but even as a young man, he made a difference in young lives in the little church across the field by working with teenage boys. He was always active in church wherever he was, serving in many capacities, including Chair of the Deacons.

More than one of Dad's pastors has told me what an encourager he was to them, but what he'll be most remembered for, I think, was his faithful work with preschoolers until he was 92 years old. There was no "been there, done that" for either my Mom or my Dad. They continued serving as long as they could get around.

Dad's work with preschoolers was a match made in heaven. They couldn't talk, and he couldn't hear! When kids started bawling, the other teachers would take them to my Dad, because their crying didn't bother him—he couldn't hear them! Dad would eventually die from lung cancer, not from smoking, which he never did, but from cotton dust. He was in the cotton business all his life. When it became apparent that Dad's journey Home was fast approaching, he told me, "I hope my job when I get to heaven is to work with the little children."

WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP, MINISTRY, and finally, **MISSION**. The idea of being on MISSION includes, among many other things, the idea of EVANGELISM.

When Dad retired, he was Director of the Cotton Marketing Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with offices all over the country wherever cotton was grown. He lived among his employees as a Christian of absolute integrity. An administrator who worked with

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<sup>6</sup> Years later, one of the men in that group became the Chair of the Pastor Search Team for the First Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee, where my parents had been members, and he asked me to submit my resume to their Search Team. I was at that time the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Bristol, Virginia. When that call came, I didn't believe that it was time to make a change, but I told him, "With all that you know about me, it is a grace-gift of the first order for you to even consider the possibility of asking me to become your pastor!"

him told me that she had never heard anything negative said about Hadley Stancil—something that was unique in her experience with Division Directors.

Dad always carried a New Testament in his pocket, and was ready to give testimony where opportunity was given; but he was very careful not to misuse his influence as “the boss” as he shared his faith. So after he retired, he methodically found ways to share the Gospel with people all over the country who had worked for him in the past.

Beyond this, after he retired, Dad helped to start two churches in Michigan, went on mission trips to Alaska, China, and Upper Volta, delivered Meals on Wheels every week for fifteen years, and volunteered weekly at the VA hospital for twenty years. One of those churches in Michigan currently supports some good friends of ours who are CBF missionaries in Kiev, Ukraine!

Besides our WORSHIP Team, FELLOWSHIP Team, DISCIPLESHIP Team, MINISTRY Team and MISSION Team, our church organization also includes the DEACONS and the ADMIN Team. I’ve already noted that my Dad served several churches as a Deacon and as the Chair of Deacons. I’d like to say just a word about ADMIN in the sense of stewardship of resources.

My parents always tithed their income, and they taught us to tithe as well. I’m grateful to be able to say that I think I’ve tithed all the income I’ve ever made to the churches of which we were members at the time; but my parents went far beyond that.

When I did my parents’ taxes the year after Dad was resurrected, I discovered that Mom and Dad had given **19%** of their adjusted gross income to Kingdom work in Dad’s last year. But it’s even better than that. After they had paid their retirement home fees, utilities, and taxes, they gave **73%** of what was left to Kingdom work. I doubt that I’ll be able to keep up with that.

It seems to me that more often than not, as persons grow older and as our ability to maintain a social façade diminishes, our true character becomes more and more apparent. When I asked Mom for some adjectives that described her soul mate, she said that he was sensitive, loving, stable, honest, of absolute integrity, and always interested in life. To these I would add that my Dad was thoughtful, considerate, grateful, humble, and kind. I think he was the most genuinely humble person I’ve ever known.

When it became clear that the end of Dad’s cancer journey was near, I asked him—using a dry marker board, since he couldn’t hear—“What’s it like to know that your ticket Home has been issued?” And he replied, “I’m ready to use it.”

The last thing I ever said to my Father was, “I love you, Dad. If you should cross over before I return, I’ll see you on the Other Side.” And so it was that on a Monday morning,<sup>7</sup> just an hour or so before I arrived, my Dad began “the Real Story, for which all of his life in this world had been only the cover and the title page. He began Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, and in which every chapter is better than the one before.”<sup>8</sup>

Well, thank you for your patience during my Father’s Day re-membling. What’s been going on in your own memory during these moments?

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<sup>7</sup> March 6, 2006

<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, book 7 in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York, Collier Books, 1956, 1970), p. 184.

Guys, the world is coming unglued all around us, and parents make the difference. What are you going to remember when all is said and done? What are your kids going to remember? Let's love our kids, spend time with them, and shape their lives NOW . . . while we still can.

I'll end with these words of encouragement from Hebrews: *So take a new grip with your tired hands and stand firm on your shaky legs. Mark out a straight path for your feet. Then those who follow you, though they are weak and lame, will not stumble and fall but will become strong* (Hebrews 12:12-13).<sup>9</sup> These are responsibilities that God has given to us as Dads, and God will help us accomplish them.

Let's roll.

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<sup>9</sup> See [www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com) for ideas and encouragement about fathering.