

Memorial Day

Exodus 12:1-28

Exodus 12:1-28 (ESV)

God used memories (the feasts) to help His people “remember” who they are and to whom they belong. I believe we should use the same principle to teach both our children and adults to “remember”.

Memorial Day is a federal holiday in the United States for remembering the people who died while serving in the country's armed forces.

Not Veterans Day for thanking those who are alive for their service, not Independence Day when we remember the reason our founding fathers fought tyranny and oppression to form our nation.

Memorial Day, which is currently observed every year on the last Monday of May, originated as Decoration Day after the American Civil War in 1868, when the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans and families, established it as a time for the nation to decorate the graves of the Union war dead with flowers. By the 20th century, competing Union and Confederate holiday traditions, celebrated on different days, had merged, and Memorial Day eventually extended to honor all Americans who died while in the military service.

Memorial Day is a day specifically set aside to “remember” the ultimate price that has been paid for our freedoms. One of which we exercise today in our freedom to worship.

On Memorial Day, many people set aside time and activities to “remember”.

There are Memorial Day parades in cities across our nation.

Many people visit cemeteries and memorial parks, particularly to honor those who have died in military service.

Many volunteers place an American flag on each grave in national and local cemeteries.

Memorial Day is a teaching tool. It's designed to teach us to pause and “remember” those who gave their all for our freedoms.

One day a year our nation sets aside this day and other days like it, to remember and honor the things which are important to us as a nation.

I am ashamed at the lack of patriotism in the nation today. I believe it is because we have allowed our children to forget the cost of freedom. We don't teach it at home or in schools anymore.

God started the practice of holiday remembrance with His people the Israelites.

God set aside three special days (3 festivals) designed to teach His people to “remember”.

1. There was the feast of Passover (that we’ve read about in this morning’s text).

At Passover, they REMEMBERED that their ancestors had once been slaves in Egypt, but God had led them out of slavery by His power and might.

Our Bill of Rights states we believe that God gave us freedom just like He did Israel.

Tyranny is slavery. Do you realize the American Revolution was started over new laws and taxes? You now pay at least 30% in taxes and congress passes new laws that restrict your freedom by the truck loads and few people even murmur much less revolt. I think Americans have forgotten that God gave us freedom not government. We’ve forgotten because we don’t teach our children to remember our history.

2. The second festival was Pentecost.

At Pentecost, Israel REMEMBERED that all their blessings came from God.

This was also called the feast of the 1st fruits, and during this festival they “remembered” that God had given them this promised land to live and raise their crops and families.

America also owes all of its prosperity to God. We the people and our Government need to consistently remember that.

3. Lastly, there was the Feast of Tabernacles.

During this festival, the people were to dwell in tents to REMEMBER the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness.

Maybe Americans need to live like the colonists 1 day a year to remember the sacrifices made by our founders to build a better life for we their descendants.

Each of these God established festivals had several things in common. They were all days set aside to “remember” something about their relationship with God.

Also on each of these festival days, the Israelites were required to return to Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 16:16 (NKJV)

This required a certain amount of sacrifice of time and effort. These festivals also cost them a literal sacrifice of the best of their flocks or herds. They were never to attend these festivals empty-handed for it wouldn’t teach them fully the cost.

Now why would God do this? Why would He require His people to leave their homes 3 times a year? Make this trek to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices at the temple?

Simply put - God wanted His people to remember. He wanted them to “remember” who they belonged to and who they were.

Theologian, William Willimon wrote these words as an analogy...

Back in high school, every Friday and Saturday night, as I was leaving home to go on a date, I remember my mother bidding me farewell at the front door with these weighty words, “Don’t forget who you are.”

My Mother did not mean that I was in danger of forgetting my name and my street address. She meant that, alone on a date, in the midst of some party, in the presence of strangers, I might forget who I was. I might lose sight of the values with which I had been raised and engage in some unacceptable behavior.

“Don’t forget who you are,” was her maternal benediction as I left home.

God wanted His people to remember who they were and so He used these festivals to teach His people to remember who they were. Children of God set aside for His purpose.

Now as Christian parents, grandparents or whatever, this is what we want for our families as well. We want our kids to grow up knowing and not forgetting who they are.

We WANT them to remember who they are...when they’re out on a date, in the midst of a party or in the presence of strangers.

AND our best way of doing that is to teach them as God did, by creating Godly memories.

Just as God involved His people with religious activities that reminded them who they were, we need to involve our families with specific spiritual activities that drive home who they are, and who God is to us.

It starts with Church... but it goes so much farther than that.

As I studied these festivals of Gods declaration, I discovered 5 principles we can use to strengthen our families in the Lord.

1st - Our Faith must not only be real but it must be urgent.

(v.11) tells us that when the Israelites ate the Passover meal, there was an urgency to that festival. There was a spirit of expectation.

A lot of people, when they go to church, don’t go with that spirit of expectation, that spirit of anticipation that God is going to do something for them or in their midst that morning. There’s no urgency to their worship. They just go thru the motions and be assured that kids pick up on that.

William Temple of the church of England made this masterful definition of worship.

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is actually incomplete till it is expressed.

That's the way we should be approaching Sunday Worship.

That's what our children/ grandchildren/ nephews and nieces ought to sense when they're around us.

2nd - Not only should we be approaching worship in anticipation but we should make every effort to make it an enjoyable and pleasing experience.

These 3 festivals were just that, festivals, parties, events. They had their somber and reflective moments but they were also a time of celebration. They were centered around celebrating the goodness and love of their God.

Do you think of Sunday service as a celebration or just a solemn ritual?

Erma Bombeck tells about a little boy in church with his mother. He was a good boy, usually quiet and well behaved. He didn't tend to cause any problems. But this service, every once in a while, he would stand up in the pew, turn around, look at the people behind him and smile at them. His smile was infectious, and soon everybody behind him was starting to smile back at him. It was all going fine until his mother realized what the little boy was doing. When she did, she grabbed him by his ear and twisted it a bit, told him to sit down and remember that he was in church. Then the boy started sniffing and crying, and she turned to him and said, "Now that's better!"

The fact is, worshippers can get caught up in being reverent about their faith, about their worship, that there is little room for smiles. For enjoyment. For happiness. For celebration.

Many kids when they become adults, turn away from church because they sense that church isn't so much a happy place as it is a dull experience filled with rules and regulations.

Worship should be a time of excitement and pleasure for our families.

3rd - Use your "worship" experiences to teach your children about our loving God. (love is a verb after all, not a noun)

(v.26) God's people used the festivals to teach their children about God. In the same way, we can use our church experiences to teach our children about God.

Communion is a teaching event.

1 Corinthians 11:26 (NKJV)

Little kids always seem to wonder why they can't eat that little piece of bread and drink out of that tiny cup. I remember as a kid always being so very thirsty at communion time.

This is a great teaching moment, to tell about Jesus' death and sacrifice and what it means to us. It's not just a cool little snack but the symbols of Jesus sacrifice for our sin.

When someone is baptized, this is another excellent teaching time to tell our children about being born into Christ. How our old selfish sinful life is buried and washed away and how we're risen up to a new life.

Use your worship experiences to teach your children/grandchildren, etc. about the love of God and life in Jesus.

4th - Incorporate sacrifice into your children's experiences.

Deuteronomy 16:17 (NKJV)

Part of our Worship should include sacrifice.

Our children should see us giving of our time and talents and finances to God. We give because we believe all we have is a blessing from God.

When you volunteer for work in the church, you are setting an example for others. We should find ways to train our children to give financially to God's kingdom... to help the poor and the hurting... to involve them in ministry that requires them to work for God.

We should have them help with various responsibilities around the church, arranging chairs, moving items, picking up, tidying up. Involve them in feeding the needy, whether making meals for Rogue Ministries or filling Blessing Bags.

5th – Don't give up, be persistent.

Lastly, one of the great disappointments of parents is that even if they do everything right, even if they do everything we've just outlined, there are still times that it doesn't seem as if their kids are responding to their efforts.

It's worth noting that God never gave up on Israel.

Even though Israel didn't always behave like a people who had remembered who they were and who their God was, God never ceased reminding them through the feasts of the Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

Similarly, we shouldn't despair if our efforts seem to be ineffective once in a while. We should be persistent and faithful and trust God for the outcome.

Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV)

Several years ago, a man wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper and argued that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me I can't remember a single one of them. So I think I'm wasting my time and I believe that preachers are wasting their time by preaching those sermons to begin with."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks...

But then, one day, someone wrote the following letter that ended the discussion. "I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I cannot recall what the exact menu was for a single one of those meals. But I do know this: they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me those meals, I would be dead today."

Tomorrow, Memorial Day is a day to remember the price that has been paid for our freedom.

As Christians, we remember Sabbath and keep it holy, we remember each Sunday the price that has been paid for our freedom from sin. We remember our Savior Jesus Christ.

This is the greatest memorial that we can pass on to our families but we cannot do it effectively if we are not committed to remember our Savior in all our ways.

Are you committed to Jesus today and remembering Him by your actions in His church? Is Your life a Memorial of Jesus Christ?