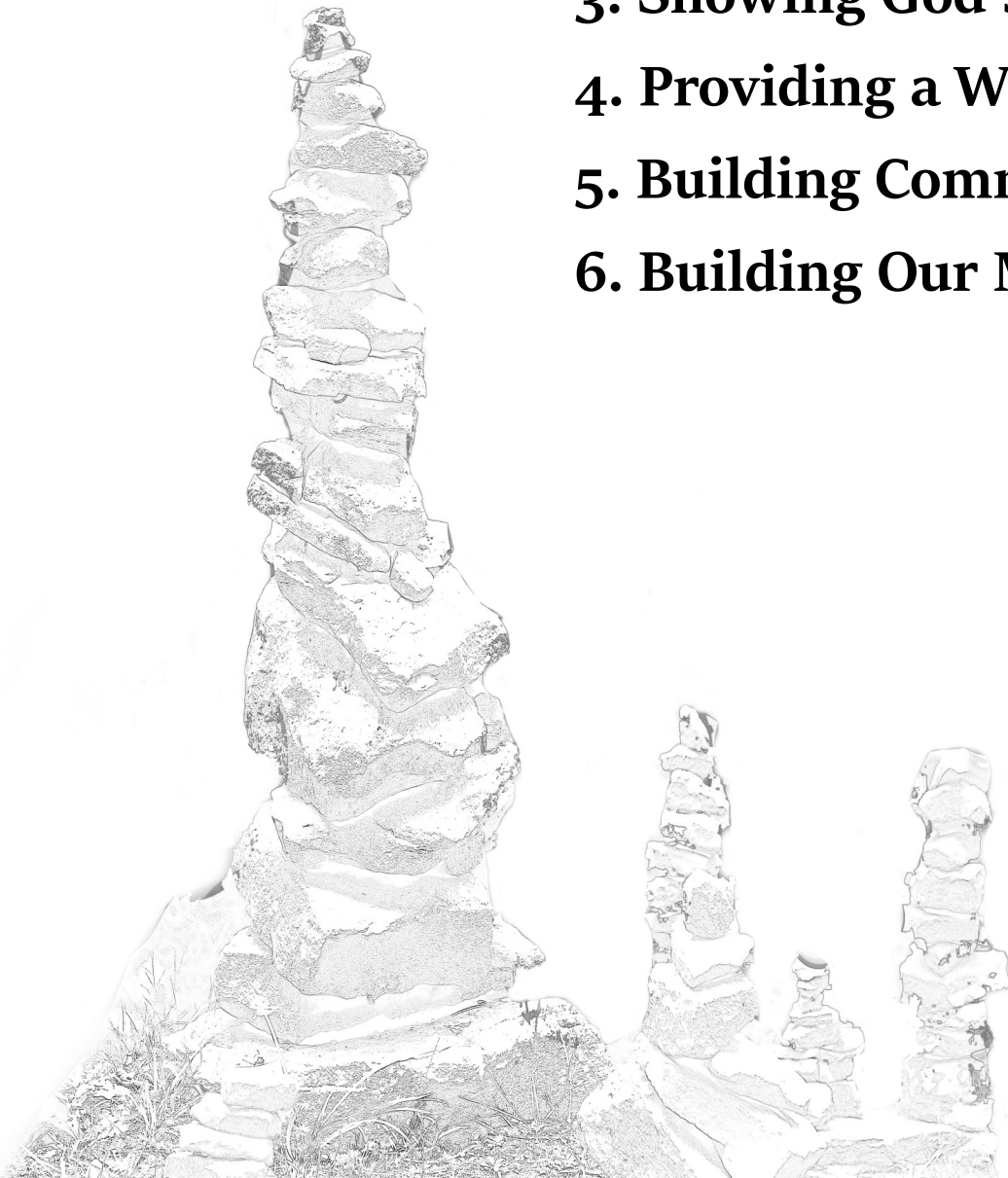


Remembering our Memorials

A six-part collection by Brianna Lambert

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What is a Memorial?

Part 1



When you hear the word “memorial” what do you think of? Perhaps we might think of the loss of a life—whether by celebrating the men and women who gave their lives for a country or for our own family members. Or maybe we think of historical monuments that pepper national museums and city sidewalks. While these are important markers of remembrance, there is so much more to memorials.

Merriam-Webster describes a memorial as “something that keeps remembrance alive.”¹ This kind of nourishment of our memory doesn’t have to be isolated to funerals and museums. In fact, our lives are filled with memorials each day though we may not choose to dwell upon them.

I know I can’t walk through my own home without spotting the memorials that thrive between the walls. The rocking chair where I cradled my children during long nights stirs me with memories of the past. The bed I climb out of each morning retells stories of a thousand mornings, late nights, disagreements, and reconciliations. Even the scars that mark my own body remind me of grief, joy, and hopes never realized. Sometimes our memorials are the songs that held us through suffering, a Scripture passage that became a lifeline in grief, or a relationship that has become a testament to the grace of God’s healing. Whatever it may be, these memorials awaken in us a memory of what was.

We find memorials all throughout the pages of Scripture. From altars built from stones to specific names of places like Jacob’s Well (Jhn. 4:6) or the waters of Meribah (Num. 20:13). We find them in objects, like the tablets of the law and the manna kept safe in the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:16; Heb. 9:4). These memorials were identified purposefully and served to quicken the people to remembrance.

But how does God use memorials in our lives? Are they merely pieces of history? The truth is, these memorials remind us of what was so that they can shape our present lives. In the following reflections I’ll highlight several ways God uses our memorials to draw us nearer to him. But before we dive into that answer, I wonder if you can first identify some of your own. What objects around your home hold your memories? What places, songs, smells, or even people quicken your heart to remember the joys or griefs of your past?

We may not have a mountain of stones in our living room, but we can be sure that God has already been building monuments of his goodness and faithfulness in our lives.

Questions:

Take some time to write down some memorials in your own life. Are there Scriptures, objects, dates, or places that serve as memorials of good or difficult times?

Further reading recommendation:

Chester, Tim. “GCD: Tim Chester on the Importance of Remembering,” February 21, 2020. <https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/2020/2/21/the-importance-of-remembering>.

1. “Memorial.” Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster. Accessed October 20, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/memorial>.

Teaching Us Who God Is

Part 2



My thirty-second birthday was a wonderful one. My husband completely surprised me with a gift to help me with my writing. His selflessness and care brought me to tears as I read the card he wrote for me, and I was reminded of his ever-present love and kindness to me. Though like always, the feelings didn't last forever.

The next day, for reasons I can't remember, I became frustrated with him. Inside I accused him of selfishness and an uncaring heart. Then the Holy Spirit intervened. You see, I forgot who my husband was. In the midst of my sinfulness, the true nature of my husband's faithfulness, love, and care for me went out the window.

I'm afraid we so easily do the same with the Lord. We are quick to forget who our God is. And this is one reason why we need the memorials around us to stir us to remember the character of the Lord our God.

We see the importance of remembering the nature of the Lord all throughout the book of Deuteronomy. In this book, Moses reminds the Israelites repeatedly that the Lord was their deliverer from the oppression of the Egyptians (Deut. 4:7, 20, 34, 35). He calls them to remember the provision of the Lord as he gave them manna in the desert, and he calls them to see that even their very shoes and clothes proclaim his loving-kindness (Deut. 29:5, 8:3). As they prepare for the upcoming battles, God reminds the people of Israel of his power and might, and his covenant relationship with them (Deut. 9:3). He knows they will be prone to forget, just like us.

God wants us to remember who he is as well. He reminds us of his character as we sit under the preaching of the Word each Sunday. He reminds us of his mighty works as we open up the Scriptures each day. And he reminds us of who he is through the seemingly small memorials he has built in our lives.

Scars that exist on our bodies might teach of God's faithfulness and comfort that he provided during that difficulty. Dates that stick out on the calendar might remind us of God's restoration. Birthdays and holidays might instill in us the truth of God's steadfast love throughout the years. All of these memorials remind us of who our God is. They prove to us that he is not far off, but he is a God who draws near to his children in their pain and suffering (Acts 17:24-28; Heb. 4:16). They remind us of his mercy, care, and power.

What do your memorials teach you about the character of the Lord? How do you remember his goodness, his patience, his faithfulness, or his power in your day to day? Though we are so quick to forget, may we bring to mind these cues that enliven our faith in the character of the Lord.

Questions:

What attributes of the Lord do your memorials bring to mind?

Has your understanding of those attributes deepened through the years, and how?

Further reading recommendation:

Attributes of God by Arthur W. Pink

The Knowledge of the Holy by A.W. Tozer

None Like Him by Jen Wilkin

Showing God's Work in Us

Part 3



While our memorials teach us about God's character, they also are a vital reminder of God's work in our own hearts. Too often it is easy to forget the growth God has given. We might be walking through a period when we feel stagnant—discouraged by our own sinfulness, or perhaps even by God's seeming silence over our troubles. We wonder why won't he come and help.

Though we'd rather it not be true, much of the Christian life involves this kind of waiting. We wait for victory over sin, wait for hearts to change, wait for relief from pain or heartache. Yet while it's true that we wait with faith, we don't wait with only faith. We wait on faith, and we hold fast to what is true. This means we are buoyed by the very words of Scripture where God has told us who he is. We wait with the assurance of the hundreds of stories and promises fulfilled throughout Scripture. But, even more, we can also hold fast and anchor our faith to the work Christ has already done in our own lives.

I can't tell you how many times I have been weary, tired, and impatient waiting on the Lord—then I've glimpsed an object, heard a song, or ran across a verse that reminded me of a difficult time God brought me through. It always girds my faith and reminds me that my hope in God is never in vain. Just as he was with me then, I know the unchanging Lord will be with me now (Mal. 3:6). These moments remind me that whether or not circumstances turn out the way I want, I can trust him, because he's already shown himself trustworthy in my very own life. This is what our memorials do—they stir us to recall the goodness of the past, so that we can be sure of his goodness in the present and future.

Besides bolstering our faith, the memorials in our lives also remind us that God is working specifically in our own sanctification. When he said he would complete a good work in us, he meant it (Phil. 1:6). This is a hard concept to grasp, especially when we find ourselves overwhelmed by our constant failures, but it's true nonetheless. When we look back and remember key monuments in our lives, can we remember how we have changed since then? Do we notice the change and growth in depth of knowledge or love in the Lord?

This reminder should never lead us to pride, but instead awe of the Lord's patient work. Just as we receive salvation by Christ's work alone, we make any change only by the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the author and the perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). We can be sure that God is faithful to carry us from one degree of glory to the next and draw us nearer to Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). And our memorials give us proof that he has done it, he is doing it, and he will do it. Will we stop and linger on the reminders and praise him for it?

Questions:

Are there certain memorials that can gird your faith in your current difficulties you are facing?

Think back on how God has drawn you nearer to him. Can you point to memorials that show evidence of this change?

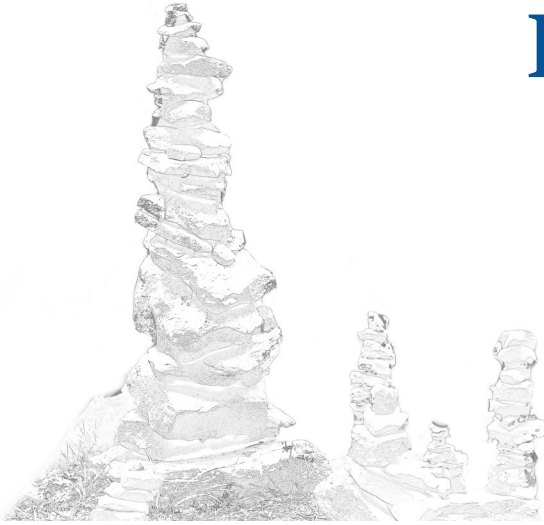
How can you use these realities in your own life to encourage a brother or sister in Christ today?

Further reading recommendation:

Lambert, Brianna. "GCD: These Cuts Are Leading Us to Christ." Gospel-Centered Discipleship. Gospel-Centered Discipleship, March 11, 2019. <https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/2019/3/11/these-cuts-are-leading-us-to-christ>.

Providing a Warning

Part 4



My youngest son had a knack for falling off chairs. No matter how many times he took a face-dive down to the floor, the next day he was right back on the edge of a chair, teetering on his tip-toes. As much as I'd not like to admit it, I think we are often the same. If we are quick to forget the goodness of the Lord, we are also quick to forget our own folly and the consequences it brings.

The Israelites in the Bible were no exception. Sometimes their reminders were not of God's goodness or faithfulness, but of their own sin. For example the waters of Meribah served as a painful reminder of their own grumbling and Moses's reckless response of disobedience when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it (Num. 20:10-13). Before they were ready to enter the Promised Land, Moses made sure to bring to mind the Israelite's disobedient stubborn, and stiff-necked hearts (Deut. 1:26, 9:6-8). The Israelites were to remember they were God's chosen people by grace, not their own merit (Deut. 9:4-5).

Our own memorials might offer painful yet needed warnings for us as well. We might feel it in the loss of time that was stolen from us by the effects of our own sin. The consequences of our actions towards our spouse, children, or church family may actually feel like a monument of stones we wish we could topple down.

It's important to not heap guilt over ourselves for our wrong-doing—for in repentance, we are given complete forgiveness as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Still, warnings and reminders of our sin aren't necessarily always bad. Perhaps the reminders of the hurt caused to a friend will temper your speech in the future. Maybe the heartache from your selflessness can be used to warn and disciple a younger woman in the faith. Sometimes we need to be warned of the consequences. We see this reality throughout the pages of the Proverbs as we are guided to pursue wisdom and consider the outcome of the fool (Pr. 12:18; 13:3, 25). We see this truth throughout the pages of the New Testament, as Hebrews reminds us to hold fast to the faith lest we prove to be ones who have fallen away (Heb. 6:1-11).

Though it's a harder topic, it's necessary to look at the memorials in our lives that warn us for the future. Where have you tasted the consequences of your sin, and how has God used it to change you? What counsel would you share with your children or a younger believer? As forgetful people, we need to remember the good as well as the bad. But above all, we must remember we have hope. For the repentant heart, sin ultimately has no foothold. In Christ, we will find help with our temptations. And in Christ, we will always find forgiveness when we seek it (Heb. 4:14-16; 1 Jhn. 1:9).

Questions:

What are some memorials that give you warnings, and how could/have they altered you?

Have you released the guilt of your repented past? Know that Christ's righteous life and his shed blood truly have freed you from your sin. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 to remember this beautiful truth.

Further reading recommendation:

Rishmawy, Derek. "5 Wrong Ways to Talk About Sin." The Gospel Coalition, December 18, 2015. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-wrong-ways-to-talk-about-sin/>.

Building Community

Part 5



One of the hardest fallouts of the Covid-19 pandemic was our loss of community. We felt this everywhere. As basketball games, graduations, concerts, races and many other yearly rituals were cancelled, our sense of community continued to diminish. It brought to light the fact that these activities and traditions not only served the purpose of entertainment, but also as a bond between those involved. So too with our own memorials.

One of the biggest ways we can see this is through the life of the church, particularly in the sacraments of the preached word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Through the regular consumption of these gifts from the Lord, we build memorials that are not only our own, but they are the whole body's. When we take the supper, we take it collectively. We pronounce God's grace and salvation and drink of his mercy together. When we hear the Word, we do it within a community who is growing, learning, and changing together, even if our circumstances are very different.

Since the beginning, God pronounced it not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). And throughout Scripture we are reminded of the communal aspect of our relationship with God. God covenanted with a people, not an individual (Jer. 30:22). And it's this same group of people who will one day worship together from every tribe, nation, and tongue when our Lord makes all things new (Rev. 7:9). The building of community is important so that we can encourage one another, exhort one another to faithfulness, and train up one another in the love of the Lord (Col. 3:14-16). We remember the deeds of the Lord together.

We can probably think of many memorials we share within the confines of our own families or groups of friends. What traditions do you have that prompt you and your family to celebrate the goodness of the Lord? What Scripture has been special to your group of your friends? What stories of joy, God's salvation, or his kindness do you tell each other again and again and again?

We were not made to be alone, but to share in the joy of the Lord's goodness together. May we approach the memorials of the sacraments as a community and work to build our own memorials with the people of the Lord.

Questions:

What communal stories do you share with your church, your family, or your friends that draw you in worship of the Lord?

How can you purposefully remind your sisters or brothers in Christ of what God has done?

Further reading recommendation:

Truth We Can Touch by Tim Chester

Treasuring Christ in Our Traditions by Noel Piper

Lambert, Brianna. "GCD: Ordinary Preaching: The Food We Can't Forget." Gospel-Centered Discipleship. Gospel-Centered Discipleship, July 8, 2019. <https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/2019/7/5/ordinary-preaching>.

Building Our Memorials

Part 6



Where do we go from here? Isn't this the question we all want to know? It's natural to want direction—easy answers or a simple formula. We can control those things. In reality it's not the answer we get, but I'll bet that it's actually the answer we need. See, as excited as we might be to go make a dozen new traditions or frame Scriptures that will remind us of xyz, it's never going to be effective as the Lord's plan. Because, for the most part, he is building our memorials already.

When we look through the Bible we can easily see that we are not the providers—God is. He is the one who provided the ram for Abraham to sacrifice (Gen. 22). He is the one who provided deliverance for the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. 1-12), and he is the one who provided salvation for us (Eph. 2:8-9). He is shaping our memorials too. He is slowly building them, just as he always was. Through whatever difficulty, grief, or confusion we are walking through, the Holy Spirit is working. He is drawing us to him, illuminating our Scripture reading, teaching through our own prayers, and showing us his goodness (Jhn. 14:26). And he is doing it better than we ever could.

God is teaching us and molding us by his perfect wisdom. As A.W. Tozer once said, this wisdom means “not only could His acts not be better done: a better way to do them could not be imagined.”¹ We can stop our hustle and our fruitless work and instead rest in God's work.

So do we sit and do nothing? No, not necessarily. We can purposefully build traditions in our family, we can keep pouring into our brothers and sisters and strengthening the bonds of community. We can keep hanging on to Scripture and soaking it in. Yet we can rest knowing that God will do the work of changing our hearts with it. Who knows what verse God will use to be a lifeline to our remembrance. Who knows what hymn he'll use to bolster our faith when we need it. We don't know how God will knit our small group together or what reminders of his goodness he'll draw out between a friend or a spouse. But we can rest knowing he will.

As we see his goodness and we start to see these tiny little monuments that stand out—let's hold on to them. Routinely bring them to mind and sing of his praises. Let's use what he's given us to help us remember our Lord's majesty and his character. Let's use the acts of our yesterdays to bolster the hope of our today. Let's make them beacons of warning when we need to and sweet salves of encouragement when we're low.

The stones of our monuments speak out to us each day and they proclaim the goodness of the Lord— let's listen.

Questions:

Now that we've spent time thinking about the memorials God has built in our lives, how will you bring them to mind?

Are there areas where you need to stop your own hustling, and rest in what God is already building?

1. Tozer, A.W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

Additional related writings from Brianna:

- **Don't Miss Your Monuments:**

<https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/2019/5/27/dont-miss-your-monuments>

- **Missed Celebration and the God of Our Memories:**

<https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/missed-celebrations>

- **Savor the Meaning of your Memory Verses:**

<https://www.reviveourhearts.com/true-woman/blog/savor-meaning-your-memory-verses/>

- **The Baby Carrier:**

<https://lookingtotheharvest.com/the-baby-carrier/>

- **Ordinary Rhythms:**

<https://lookingtotheharvest.com/ordinary-rhythms/>



These rock towers are from a photograph my husband took while we were hiking the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia.