

Remember The Marks of A True Believer

Research has been conducted to determine how long people remember a pastor's sermon or a teacher's lesson. But in reality, all of us remember differently. How long we remember things varies as well as how soon we forget. One of the questions I thought about some years ago was, "How long did it take before I had trouble remembering my own sermon?" It was an interesting thought process to realize that after a couple of days I started having trouble remembering some of what I had taught on Sunday morning. And I gave the message! It was even more difficult to try and remember a month later and forget the idea of remembering a year later! I think most of you have had similar experiences. Somebody preaches a message or you go to a Bible study; by the time you get home, you probably already have difficulty remembering most of what you just heard. So, you wonder what am I learning? Yet, sometime later when someone asks you a question, all of a sudden you remember a point. But if you try to recall it on your own, it can be very difficult.

So, it is interesting that we find evidence in Scripture that God understands. In Genesis 18:17, God commands Abraham to teach his children. We read,

The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of

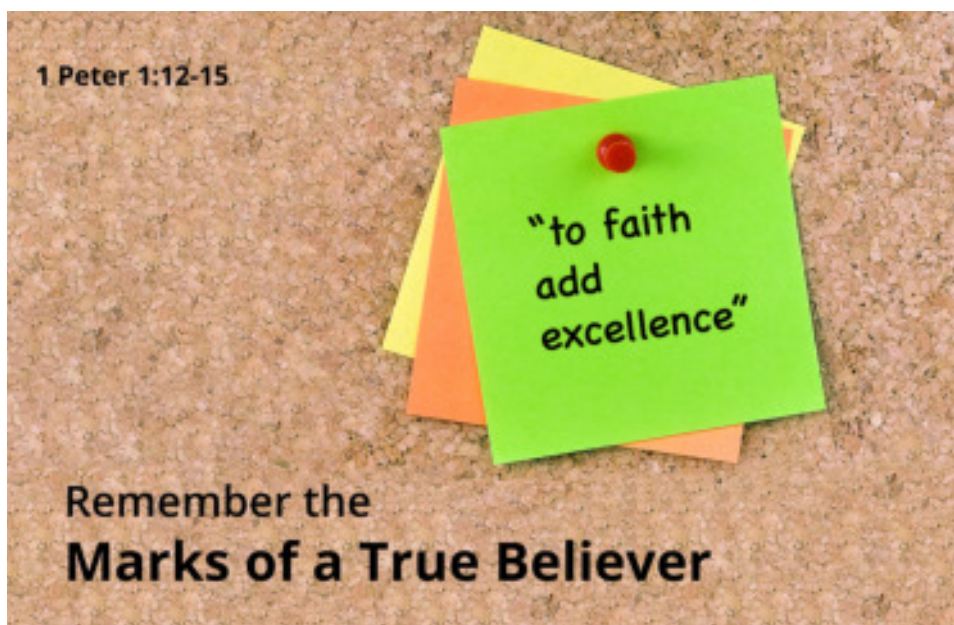
the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children . . . Genesis 18:17-19a (NASB)

now watch,

. . . and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." Genesis 18:19b (NASB)

The word for "command" here in the Hebrew is in the imperfect tense and that means Abraham is supposed to continue commanding his children. When was the last time you heard someone make the point that Abraham was commanded to teach his children about God? Here is God's command that

Abraham is to command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord. This is the basis for husbands to teach their wives, and fathers to teach their children. It is the principle for us to teach one another. So I thought it was



interesting that Abraham was supposed to keep commanding. Now why would God tell Abraham to repeatedly command his children? The word "command" is in the imperfect that implies a repetitive action. So why are we supposed to repeatedly command our children to obey and follow God?

In Deuteronomy 4:10, we find that Moses is speaking and says,

Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, “Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.” Deuteronomy 4:10 (NASB)

God wanted all Israel to come before Moses so that He could teach them and their children. What is amazing about this passage of Scripture is that Deuteronomy is a summary of Leviticus. A lot of what is taught in Leviticus is summarized and part of what is in Exodus is summarized in the book of Deuteronomy. So this is a repeat. God wants both the adults and the children to learn His words.

In Deuteronomy 6:4, which is called the great Shamah, we read,

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! Deuteronomy 6:4 (NASB)

Then verse 7 says,

You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:7-9 (NASB)

The message of the passage is that we are to teach our children. The word for teach is in the perfect tense, implying that we are to do it and keep on doing it. It is another reminder that we are to repetitively be teaching our children about God.

Now why is God doing this? Because we tend to forget! We cannot remember 2 hours later what the sermon was about, let alone the next day, or a month later. But if it is

repeated enough and the right circumstances occur, we have this amazing ability to remember something that applies to a current situation. God knows our frailty and so He commands us to remember and to teach others so that we all will remember.

Psalm 119:11 is a passage of Scripture that I memorized as a boy. Psalm 119:11 says,

Your word I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.
Psalm 119:11 (NASB)

David memorized Scripture. That is the best way to remember. You memorize it and you review it and review it so that you will remember.

The apostle Paul was familiar with the problem. In 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul was speaking to the Christians who were in the city of Corinth and said,

For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. 1 Corinthians 4:17 (NASB)

Paul said, I am teaching this everywhere and in every church and Timothy is going to come remind you of what I have taught you.

So You Can Remember These Things. At this point we have learned that God understands that we have a memory problem. The apostle Paul understood the problem. In our study now in 2 Peter 1:12-15, you will find that Peter understood the problem too. Peter understood that we have a problem remembering. When we read the whole passage, you can see that he was talking about remembering. In verse 12, Peter said that he is ready to remind us. In verse 13, he told us that it is right to remind us. In verse 15, he told us he will be diligent to remind us. Here is the passage,

Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have

been established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it a right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind. 2 Peter 1:12-15 (NASB)

Peter says he is ready to remind them. Peter says it is right for him to remind them. He says he is being diligent to remind them so that after his departure, they can recall. So you might have wondered why I was talking about memory in our introduction. The answer is that every pastor, teacher, and Christian needs to remind other believers of the truths of the word of God. Peter's emphasis in this passage is that believers need to remember spiritual qualities they must possess if they are true Christians.

Always Be Ready to Remind You. So, we will examine each verse individually. Verse 12 says,

Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them . . . 2 Peter 1:12a (NASB)

I am going to stop there. Notice that when Peter said "therefore," it is pointing back to verses 5-11. For Peter said in verse 12, "to remind you of these things." What things? The things that are in verses 5-11. We saw them in our last study. They are eight different spiritual qualities that will be increasing in an individual if the person is a believer. If they are increasing, they give a person assurance that they are a real Christian. So he says, I want to remind us of these things. That tells us those eight qualities of spiritual growth must exist in the life of a true Christian. When was the last time you heard someone talk about those eight qualities of spiritual growth?

Then Peter said,

. . . even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. 2 Peter 1:12b (NASB)

He is looking forward when he said, "and have been established in the truth which is present with you." The message is that they were already established. I want you to notice that. This tells us that Peter had already taught these eight principles of spiritual growth.

Some people have wondered what he means by "the truth." There are a number of views as to what this means. Let me just quickly make the point that when he said, "established in the truth," he is not saying that they knew the Scriptures. I believe they knew Scripture, but I do not believe that what he is saying is that they knew all of the Scriptures because the Scriptures were not yet completely written. The rest of the New Testament had not been completed. The book of Revelation had not been written. So, when he said that you have been established in the truth, the truth cannot refer to all of the New Testament. It is important to notice that he said, "which is present in you." He is talking about the fact that they are believers. Truth was established in them in the sense that they were believers. So Peter said, you are believers who have already heard about these eight qualities of spiritual growth.

Awaken You to Reminder. In verse 13, he said,

I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder. 2 Peter 1:13 (NASB)

In verse 12, he said that I am ready to remind you. A good pastor or teacher is ready to remind. A Christian should be ready to remind another Christian about those biblical principles that will help them through situations through which they are going.

Peter said "It is right that I remind you." It is as if he was defending himself. It is right for me to do this. Sometimes we hear a preacher repeat some principles in Scripture and we are a little discouraged that they are doing that. Sometimes I hear the criticism, "He is repeating himself again." But he is supposed to repeat himself. He is to be ready to repeat himself. It is right for him to repeat himself so that we will remember.

Then he said, "to stir you up by way of reminder." The word for "stir up" in the Greek has the idea to arouse or to

awaken. Think about that. It is right to awaken us. It is as if we were asleep. So Peter said, "It is right for me to awaken you. Stop sleeping! Wake up and remember!" Peter was describing it as though they were asleep. I was thinking about the illustration with which I began. A couple of hours after a sermon, or after a lesson taught by a teacher, it is difficult to remember what you were taught. A day later, you will remember even less. A month later, you might not even remember that you even sat and listened to the pastor or listened to the teacher. Forget remembering anything a year later! It is close to impossible. It is as if you are asleep and so it is right for me to awaken you so that you will remember. Wake up! Remember what I taught you.

Peter's Motivation to Remind Them. Then Peter explained why he was saying these things,

Knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent . . . 2 Peter 1:14a (NASB)

He said he was going to die soon. He adds,

. . . as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 2 Peter 1:14b (NASB)

Now it could be that what Peter was referring to is John 21. In John 21, Jesus was having a discussion with Peter. In verses 15-17, Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Peter responded and then Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you." He is talking to Peter and continues with,

. . . when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go. John 21:18 (NASB)

Jesus was talking about His own death. Verse 19 makes that point clear,

Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death He would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He

said to him, "Follow Me!" John 21:19 (NASB)

We know from history that when Peter was about to be put to death by crucifixion on a cross in the same position as Christ, he asked to be crucified upside down. So, they crucified him upside down. Now when Peter said that he is going to soon die, I wonder if he was remembering what Jesus said in John 21:18 and 19? Is that all that means? Or, did Jesus tell him that in a certain number of years he was going to die? Did Jesus tell Peter privately that he was going to soon die? Or, was it obvious to Peter that he was going to soon die? We do not have the answer. There are any number of possibilities. All we know is that Peter said he was going to soon die. We believe that Peter died about A.D. 67. That is why Peter was making the point that he is ready to remind them. He said it is right that, "I remind you." He said, "Especially given the fact that I am going to die soon." He wants them to remember these things.

Call These Things to Mind. Then he said,

And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind. 2 Peter 1:15 (NASB)

Now notice what he does again. He was talking about "these things." In verse 12, he said that he was ready to remind them. Then he said that it is right for "me to remind you." Now in verse 15, he says, I am going to "be diligent to remind you so that after my departure you will remember these things." I wonder, how many times did Peter actually teach this? I could not help but think about the role of pastors and teachers and their need to faithfully review. They need to remind because we forget. They need to review by illustration. They need to review by reading the verses again and again. Review the principles. Scripture does that. How many times throughout Scripture do you read about Jesus dying on a cross and coming back to life? How many times do you repeatedly read different principles about God or the fact that we are sinners? If we do not read the principle that we are a sinner, such as Romans 3:23, we forget. That verse says,

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
Romans 3:23 (NASB)

Also, there are illustrations in Scripture that we are sinners. Some sins described in Scripture are really appalling. Scripture reminds us and reminds us in different ways. We should not be surprised when we go from one book in the Bible to another book in the Bible and we read some of the same principles. We should not be surprised. Why? Because God wants to remind us and remind us. That is why.

But in this passage, Peter said that his purpose for reminding them is so that they will be able to call these things to mind. He wants them to remember the spiritual qualities they must possess if they are true Christians. As these spiritual qualities are increasing, they will be assured that they are believers.

Imitating Peter. Now you might be thinking that we have finished this study. But that is not correct. I want to talk about “these things.” Let me do what Peter did. I want to be ready to remind you. It is right for me to remind you, and I am going to be diligent to remind you because in verse 12 Peter wants to remind us of “these things.” At the end of verse 15, he wants us to remember “these things.” What are “these things?” They are in verses 5-11. Now I am *not* going to reteach that entire study. But I want to emphasize a particular aspect of that study.

I want to talk about the first three qualities of spiritual growth. They describe the process of spiritual growth. We understand that we are supposed to walk in the spirit and walking in the spirit is the key to victory in the Christian life. That is the key to growing spiritually. 1 John 2:12-14 gives us an illustration of spiritual growth and it helps us understand where we are in that process because it talks about little children, that is the newborn Christian, young men and fathers of the faith. We can read the passage and understand where we are. It is like a measuring stick, so we can understand where we are in the process of growing spiritually. What Peter has done is to give us some essential qualities that must be true.

We Begin With Saving Faith. We will start with verse 5. I want to emphasize some particular aspects. Verse 5 says,

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence. 1 Peter 1:5 (NASB)

The word for “apply” means to add to. So he is talking about adding to our faith and faith is where we start. The faith is the starting point. We become a Christian by faith. We believe in Jesus. Our sins are forgiven. We are regenerated. We become a new creation or new creature, a new person. We are transformed. We are now called saints. We are declared to be righteous. That is what happens when a person believes in Christ. So he said, “you are to add something to your faith.” This is the starting point. Our faith is just a starting point and in order to grow spiritually, we need to add to that faith.

Faith Plus Moral Excellence. Remember Romans 1:17 and other passages in the New Testament say we are to walk by faith. Here we told to add to our faith moral excellence. The word for “moral excellence” actually is the same word that appears at the end of verse 3, “excellence.” We are told “His own glory and excellence.” We should insert “moral” right before the word “excellence” in verse 3 or delete the word “moral” in verse 5. It is the same word but for some reason the New American Standard translates the word differently. What we are being told is that we are to add excellence to our faith. The Greek word here is “*arete*.” It has the idea of moral courage. It was actually used sometimes of somebody who was going to do something that was life threatening. They went ahead and did the right thing anyway. It would be like a mother dying to save her child. It is a lofty term. It has the idea in this context of spiritual heroism. It is the idea of faith coupled with this exceedingly incredible excellence. The idea is that we are to take our faith to the pinnacle. We started with faith. We are walking by faith. We are to take our faith to the pinnacle. Let me give you some examples. I am going to repeat a couple from last time.

In Hebrews 11:7, we are told,

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen . . . Hebrews 11:7a (NASB)

The message is he hadn’t seen these things. Noah had not seen rain. He did not understand a worldwide flood. That

was something he had never seen. Then we are told,

... in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. Hebrews 11:7b (NASB)

What does this mean? Noah had never heard about rain. He did not understand what rain was, but he went out and he obeyed God anyway. Then in verse 8, we are told,

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. Hebrews 11:8 (NASB)

Imagine going from one place to another place and God says, "When you get there, I will show you where you are supposed to be. You are just supposed to move out and I will direct you." So Abraham went out. He did not have a GPS. He did not have an iPhone. He did not even have a map. He did not have anything that today we might consider to be essential. He just started moving and God directed him. Abraham was faithful. Abraham had no idea what was going to happen; he just obeyed.

Then we read in verse 17,

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son. Hebrews 11:17 (NASB)

Here Abraham was offering up the son who was to inherit the promises. Wouldn't that seem to be a mistake? But Abraham went ahead and planned to offer his son. Abraham went ahead and did what seemed to be wrong because God told him to do it. Have you ever read something in Scripture and said to yourself, "I do not think that will work." I have had people tell me that. They read something and said, "If I do that, all kinds of trouble will happen." Are we smarter than God? Abraham really believed God and obeyed. Noah did too.

Let me give you some passages about faith. Have you ever read where Jesus told people they had little faith? May I ask you, do you have little faith? How much faith do you have? Where would you put yourself on a scale from 1 to 10? Would you say that you are a 1, or a 5 when it comes to trusting God or having faith in God? Are you a 10? Where are you on the scale?

Matthew 6:30 says,

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Matthew 6:30

Jesus was talking to the people and told them they have little faith. Why did He say that? Verse 31 says, "Do not worry then." See that little statement? What does that reveal about little faith? If you have little faith, you worry. Or put another way; if you worry, that means you have little faith. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus talked about worry five times. I want you to see that. Look at verse 25,

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life . . . Matthew 6:25 (NASB)

Then look at verses 27-28,

And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Matthew 6:27-28 (NASB)

In verse 31, we just read, "Do not worry then." Then in verse 34, He said,

Do not worry about tomorrow. Matthew 6:34 (NASB)

What is one sign of little faith? Worry! What is excellence in faith? To our faith we are to add moral excellence. We are not to worry. We are to trust God.

Look at Matthew 8:23. The disciples were out at sea and Jesus was asleep. Verse 23-25 say,

When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" Matthew 8:23-25 (NASB)

Notice what Jesus said in verse 26,

Why are you afraid, you men of little faith? . . . Matthew 8:26a (NASB)

What is another symptom of little faith? Fear. We know that because He said, "why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" He connected fear and little faith.

Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. Matthew 8:26b (NASB)

If you know anything about seas, even if a storm stops immediately, the waters continue to toss. The fact that the water was instantly perfectly calm was a miracle. So far we see the symptoms of little faith are worry and fear.

Look now at Matthew 14:31. This time the disciples were out on the sea and Jesus came walking to them. Verse 28 tells us that Peter said to him,

Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water. Matthew 14:28 (NASB)

I have to admit that I think Peter wanted to have a fun experience. Now look at verses 29-31. They say,

And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Matthew 14:29-31 (NASB)

So what is another symptom of little faith? Doubt.

The fourth example is found in Matthew 16. It is amazing that Matthew has recorded all of these examples. Matthew 16:8 says,

But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?" Matthew 16:8 (NASB)

This is a fourth example of little faith and you might be wondering what Jesus was talking about. What is the problem? If you look back at verse 7 we read,

They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "He said that because we did not bring any bread." Matthew 16:7 (NASB)

The message is that Jesus had warned the disciples in verse 6 about the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Now the disciples were talking among themselves. They were struggling and anxious about how to respond. So, this is an example of anxiety and Jesus said, "You men of little faith."

What are the symptoms of little faith? Doubt, fear, anxiety, and worry are all symptoms of little faith. Peter said, "Add to your faith, moral excellence." That is, bring your faith up to a pinnacle. You do not worry. You do not have fear. You are not in doubt. You are not anxious. You are like Noah and like Abraham. You trust God. That is the next quality to add to your faith. So, you start with faith and then you perfect your faith.

How to Add Excellence to Your Faith. Look now at the next verse. In Matthew 16:9, Jesus asks,

Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? Matthew 16:9-10 (NASB)

What is the answer to adding excellence to your faith? Remember what God has already done in your life. That

is how you build your faith. You remember what God has already done. One way to do that is to memorize Scripture. David said that he was going to memorize Scripture that he would not sin against God. How about memorizing Scripture so you can remember the faithfulness of God? Memorize Scripture to remember the faithfulness of God and then remember what He has done in your own life. That is how we build moral excellence on our faith. I believe it is the first fundamental principle of a Christian. That is the starting point. Peter said, I want to remind you of these things. He said, I am ready to do it. It is right for me to do it. I am going to be diligent to do it. Why? Because it is important for our spiritual growth that we build on our faith.

Add Knowledge to Your Excellence. Then he added in 2 Peter 1:5,

... and in your moral excellence, knowledge. . . . 2 Peter 1:5b (NASB)

Romans 10:2 talks about zeal without knowledge. You can trust God and trust God and trust God. But if you have no guidance and no direction, it is just zeal. You are trusting God, but you may still do stupid things. Zeal without knowledge is actually sin.

Add Self-Control to Your Knowledge. Verse 6 then says,

And in your knowledge, self-control . . . 2 Peter 1:6 (NASB)

It is the idea that you are controlling yourself. One of the major problems many have though believers is self-control. We end up sinning because we do not fight sin. We do not fight the temptation to sin.

Add Perseverance to Your Self-Control. Then we are told to persevere. That is, you continually fight the battle for self-control. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27 that he keeps fighting the battle of his flesh. Self-control is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It only grows as we walk in the Spirit. As perseverance increases, your self-control increases. If you are a true believer, godliness will

be added to your perseverance. To your godliness, you find that brotherly kindness will grow. Then love will be added to your brotherly kindness, if you are a believer and a growing believer. I will not walk through each of these last qualities of spiritual growth. You get the idea.

Conclusion. Peter wants believers to remember these eight essential qualities of spiritual growth. We are to cultivate them. They will grow as we walk in the Holy Spirit. If you are a believer, you see them grow in your life. The last essential spiritual quality is God's love. It is the ultimate spiritual quality. That is the highest form of love. It is the love that is a result of a decision. It is our choice to do that. It is the pinnacle of love. Do you remember what Jesus said the first commandment is?

YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD
WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL
YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.
Matthew 22:37 (NASB)

Do you see the logical progression of what Peter is teaching us? Peter wanted to remind us of these things so we will remember the signs that we are true Christians. If these spiritual qualities are yours and are increasing, then you will gain confidence that you are a true believer. So, Peter says remember these eight essential qualities of spiritual growth. Cultivate them. As you do, you will be assured that you are a believer and you will become more like Christ.