

#137 “Be Careful to Remember”
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In 1 Samuel 7:12, we read, “Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the LORD has helped us.’” Samuel rightly understood that the victory of the Israelites over the Philistines was a result of the work of God on their behalf. It was God who thundered and enabled the defeat of the Philistines (v. 10). In a very simple and symbolic gesture, Samuel picked up a rock, set it at a particular geographic location, and named it “Thus far God has helped us” as a remembrance of what God had done for Israel on that day. Hitherto the Lord had helped Israel, and it was imperative that Israel would remember God’s help going forward. How easy it is for us to forget the goodness and provision of God and to even forget specific and highly memorable events in our lives when we are sure that God has worked on our behalf! The Ebenezer stone is an Old Testament example of a symbolic event that would help Israel recall to mind the faithfulness and power of God. Perhaps someday a child would stumble upon that Ebenezer rock and wonder why it was there. The story could then be told of how God delivered Israel from the Philistines as a means to bolster the child’s faith in God. Remembrance can and does spur increased faith and faithfulness.

One of Satan’s schemes is to distract us and allow us to forget how God has been faithful to us in the past. Perhaps Satan will, with God’s permission (Job 1), bring tragedy into our lives to trick us into forgetting the mercy of God as we become distracted by present difficulties. Or, perhaps, he will exploit the goodness of God manifested in our lives by distracting us from worshipping the true Source of the goodness. Whatever his methodology, his desired result is that we forget God and His faithfulness to us. God, on the other hand, wants us to remember (Deuteronomy 8:2, 18). Here is God’s warning to Israel for when they would enter Canaan and finally experience the fruition of the promise of God to Abraham:

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14).

The lesson here is that there is a direct correlation between the heart becoming proud and forgetting God which inevitably leads to a less than faithful lifestyle. When times are bad, we can get caught up in the overwhelming circumstances and emotions, dwelling on ourselves rather than God, which is a twisted form of pride. When times are good, the many things around us to enjoy can become our

undoing if we forget our God Who is the best and most valuable resource that we have. Our enemy is shrewd, and we must remember that we are vulnerable in both good times and in bad. We are prone to forget the deliverance of God and how He has worked in our lives specifically in times past. This is why Samuel's example of setting up a rock and naming it "Ebenezer" matters. Samuel made a point to remember and to help himself and the Israelites remember a specific instance of God's faithfulness. As they would go on with their lives, it would be valuable to recall to remembrance this instance of God's faithfulness because it would remind them of the very nature of God, Who is faithful.

Now we don't necessarily need to go and find a rock or other object and name it. It is not the exact methodology that needs to be applied as much as the intentionality behind the methodology. In other words, it is not the physical memory tool that matters nearly as much as the exercise and effort to recall God's faithfulness on our behalf in the past. No matter what the events are around us or how we feel, we need to recall to mind Scripture about God's love and faithfulness. And it is also helpful and edifying to remember when we were in confusing, difficult places before and how God caused all things to work for our good. We need to remember, for example, when we were pulled out of a pit of despair, had our eyes and hearts opened to the truth, were saved from an addiction, were delivered from temptation, were spared a negative relationship, were miraculously provided for, were granted new strength, were given what we prayed for, etc. We each have a story to tell of how God has worked in our lives, and we, of all people, need to recall those provisions and works of God in our lives. God is real, He is at work always around us and in us, and He cares. He cares that we would remember His goodness such that we would choose to believe and be faithful in the present.

We may not have named a stone "Ebenezer" in honor of God's deliverance, but surely we have our own stories to recall to mind of His faithfulness, provision, mercy, love, and power. When we feel like giving up or giving in or if we begin to feel nothing at all in regard to our Lord, let us be faithful to recall to remembrance the faithfulness of our God. May God enable us to be intentional about remembering and to beware lest we forget.