

Forgetting and Remembering

New Year's Devotional

Written by: UPC Pastor Dave Rohrer (2005)

Anticipating a new year offers us the opportunity to think about what we have done and to dream about what we might like to do. As we review the past year there are things that we celebrate and things that we would just as soon forget. So at the turn of a new year we often resolve to refrain from doing something or resolve to adopt some new practice. But the problem with resolutions is that they can focus too much of our attention and energy on ourselves and our behavior, rather than on God and God's gracious work in us.

Therefore, instead of focusing on resolutions that reflect what you might be thinking about yourself, the Scriptures below invite us to consider what God is thinking about us. As we review the past year and look forward to the next, God invites us to both forget something and remember something: He calls us to forget our identity as slaves to sin and he calls us to remember our identity as his beloved children.

These texts from Isaiah are set in the context of the exile of the Jews in Babylon. At the point these texts were written, that exile was coming to an end. Return to Jerusalem was imminent. A new life was before them. But they were also reeling from the 70 years of exile in a foreign land. They were the people of God who had been living as slaves. As they began to look toward freedom the prophet came to them with the invitation to forget the pain of the exile and to remember the steadfast love of God.

FORGETTING:

Isaiah 43:14-21

God's Mercy and Israel's Unfaithfulness

This is what the LORD says — your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride.

I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King.”

This is what the LORD says — he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters,

who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”

Spend some time enumerating the ways God has freed, rescued or forgiven you this past year. What are the events, situations or pains that you are glad to leave behind? Write these things down. Spend some time in prayer, thanking God for the ways he has redeemed or freed you. Come up with some way to symbolically let go of, or forget, the things on this list. Destroy your list.

REMEMBERING:

Isaiah 51: 1-3

Everlasting Salvation for Zion

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many.

The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.”

How has your identity as a child of God been confirmed to you this past year? What are some tangible ways that you have experienced God’s love? Write these things down and keep this list in a place where you can refer to it (in a journal, on a page in your Bible, on a piece of paper you keep in your Bible, etc.). Spend some time in prayer thanking God for these confirmations of his love. At the end of the prayer time read Lamentations 3:19-24.

Lamentations 3:19-24

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.

I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”