

REMEMBER

Traditionally, December has been a month to look at the past year and take note of the events that have occurred. What are your memories of 2011? Some of you remember the diagnosis of a grave illness. Some remember taking that final cancer treatment. Others remember the rebellion of a child or have the sorrowful memory of the loss of a loved one. And others have the bright memory of joining together in marriage or of bringing a new life into the world.

All of us at Westridge, as the family of God, share common memories of the past year. Like our personal memories, some remembrances are painful: we remember conflict, grief, and emotional pain. Yet we also share pleasant memories of men who stepped forward to lead us in uncertain times, of the renewed zeal of many for the Lord's work, and times of joyful singing and fellowship.

The new year is certain to bring us unknown challenges and trials. Uncertainty about the future can cause spiritual unrest, doubt and fear. However, as we learn in Scripture from young David, our memories of the past can give us courage to face future tests, as long as we remember one thing: God is our help.

Have you ever wondered where this shepherd boy acquired the courage to fight the massive warrior Goliath? The soldiers of Israel, although experienced in battle, trembled in fear as this giant man taunted them day after day, daring them to come fight. Yet when young David heard Goliath's mockery and saw that none of Israel's warriors would step forward to meet him, he volunteered to battle him, despite his own youth and inexperience.

When King Saul pointed out the absurdity of a youth attempting to fight a soldier of experience, David told him the source of his courage: *'Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.'* (1 Samuel 17:34-37)

David's courage and assurance came from remembering the help God had given him in the past. We can learn from David's example. As we look at the future of our congregation and the challenges that face us, we can remember the help that God has given us in the past. We can look back at the year's events and see God's hand at work in raising up leaders of the congregation, in giving joy in the midst of our grief, in giving wisdom, and in guiding us in the way we should go.

Failure to remember God's help in our past will cause us to miss the peace and rest He gives. Do you remember the complaints the Israelites made as Moses led them through the desert toward the Promised Land? They griped because, unlike David, they failed to remember how God had rescued them in the past. God had freed them from slavery, He had led them away from their enemies on dry ground through the Red Sea, and He had provided them with food and water in the wilderness, yet they forgot about these blessings when the way ahead became uncertain and scary. Their forgetfulness caused them to doubt God and rebel against Him, leading to the forfeiture of their rest in the land God had promised them.

We must learn from both David and his example of faithful recollection of God's rescue, and from the Israelites and their failure to remember. The first will lead to blessing and victory, the second to doubt and falling away. To be able to face the future's challenges and uncertainties with assurance, we must continually remember the God who has been our source of help in the past.

Since our memories tend to be short and defective, we often rely on external cues to help us remember. God in His mercy has always provided for man's faulty memory. We read in Scripture that He instructed the Israelites to construct altars or monuments, so that each time they saw those structures they would remember His help at that place. He has given us the symbols of Christ's blood and body in the form of wine and bread; as we hold these physical emblems, we remember the greatest of all loves and sacrifices.

There are other ways in which we can remember God's help in our lives:

- ~*Write it down*—Designate a special notebook and write down each time God blesses, protects, guides, or answers prayer. Blog, keep an online journal, use electronic devices to write down events
- ~*Tell others*—Telling the story of a specific time of God's blessing will help you to remember it
- ~*Listen to others*—Other Christians will remind you of God's help in the past
- ~*Spend time each day* remembering how God has blessed you and our congregation

The way ahead for Westridge may seem uncertain and we will face many challenges, but if we will recall all the ways in which God has worked for our good in the past then we can know, brothers and sisters, that He will work for our good in the future and always. We just need to remember.

~a Westridge Member