

## Never Again: God'S Purpose For Bad Memories

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Given 25-Apr-15; Sermon #1264B

For those who like titles for messages, we will call this one “Never Again: God’s Purpose for Bad Memories.”

April 16<sup>th</sup>, nine days ago, was Holocaust Memorial Day. There are some things we would prefer to permanently forget, but God has purposed that we need to keep their memory alive to facilitate the overcoming and sanctification process. We are going to look at several unsettling scriptures we have heard several times over the past several months. I will read from the Amplified Bible (AMP).

**Ecclesiastes 12:14** For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good or evil.

Let us move forward to Mark 4:22 for another facet of this subject.

**Mark 4:22** [Things are hidden temporarily only as a means to revelation.] For there is nothing hidden except to be revealed, nor is anything [temporarily] kept secret except in order that it may be made known.

**Luke 8:17** For there is nothing hidden that shall not be disclosed, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come out into the open.

**I Corinthians 4:5** So do not make any hasty *or* premature judgments before the time when the Lord comes [again], for He will both bring to light the secret things that are [now hidden] in darkness and disclose *and* expose the [secret] aims (motives and purposes) of hearts. Then every man will receive his [due] commendation from God.

As Mark Twain once observed in his story, “The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg,” they (the main characters Mary and Edward Richards) were to learn that a sin takes on new and real terrors when there seems a chance that it is going to be found out. Nothing could be more horrifying to any of us than the prospect of something we have kept as a secret being broadcast through the entire community. Consider the baggage of guilt that

Never Again: God's Purpose For Bad Memories by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Joseph's brothers carried with them until it was revealed to everybody.

Back in 1968, Karl Beyersdorfer, in the Duluth, Minnesota congregation, gave a series of Bible studies on the book of Ecclesiastes. When he came to chapter 12, verse 14, he asked the congregation, "What if we, through the means of some electrodes placed in the brain, could project our hidden thoughts on a big screen in Technicolor?" Many of us broke out in a clammy, cold sweat just contemplating the prospect.

Advances in psycho-surgery over the past 150 years have brought a measure of additional concern. On September 13, 1848, a railroad worker in Vermont by the name of Phineas Gage served as the first guinea pig in the new frontier of psycho-surgery. Gage was a foreman directing a work gang preparing a roadbed for the Rutland and Burlington Railroad, setting blasting powder and compacting the charge with a three-foot seven-inch tamping iron. Evidently the iron sparked against the rock, setting off the explosive. The iron bar was driven through the left side of Gage's face and out the top of the head. Gage survived, but his personality vastly changed. The gaping hole enabled doctors to insert electrodes into the gray matter of the cerebral cortex, revealing not only that memories were localized in specific regions throughout the brain.

Subsequent advances in psycho-surgery enabled doctors to electrically stimulate regions of the brain, causing neurosurgical patients to spontaneously retrieve memories, including sounds, sights, smells, as if it were occurring in real time in the present. Consequently, scientists have concluded that everything we have experienced in our lives—good or bad—has been permanently stored.

In the case of dementia or Alzheimer's disease, the connections have been damaged or scrambled, but thankfully the data is still there. We can be sure that Almighty God has a data retrieval system to put it all back together in the fullness of time. Having kept a daily journal since October 13, 1971 (over 44 years—longer than most of my students have been alive), I recommend that the written word works every bit as effectively as an electrode as a memory stimulator—and is much less painful or hazardous.

What I am concerned with is why God wants us to continue to have large reservoirs of painful memories from our past—some that go back to grade school and before. Sadly, the most terrifying blunders and mistakes I have made have occurred after my initial conversion rather than before. I shudder at the stupid, hurtful things that I did in my past, shuddering in horror at their vivid presence. Emily Dickinson once wrote:

REMORSE is memory awake, Her companies astir—

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A presence of departed acts At window and at door.

Its past set down before the soul, And lighted with a match,

Perusal to facilitate Of its condensed despatch.

Remorse is cureless—the disease Not even God can heal;

For 't is His institution— The complement of hell.

Count Alfred Korzybski, the father of General Semantics, stated emphatically “God will forgive your sins, but your nervous system will never.” Bob Harrington, dubbed the chaplain of Bourbon Street, once declared that he believed in purgatory alright, but that it was on this side of the grave. Well, then, what about Christ’s blood purging our consciences, as we read about in Hebrews 9:14:

**Hebrews 9:14** How much more surely shall the blood of Christ, Who by virtue of [His] eternal Spirit [His own preexistent divine personality] has offered Himself as an unblemished sacrifice to God, purify our consciences from dead works *and* lifeless observances to serve the [ever] living God?

Evidently, the purification of our consciences does not work the same as Hillary Clinton’s purging her hard-drive. Even after God forgives our sins, the data remains there for us to contemplate.

**Psalms 103:11-12** For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great are His mercy *and* loving-kindness toward those who reverently *and* worshipfully fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

It appears that even though God has chosen to totally obliterate our sins from His thoughts, that the trace memories of these past transgressions in our nervous systems serve a definite purpose in our sanctification process, while we still draw breath. For one thing, the pain and agony of past transgressions lead us to appreciate the sanctity of God’s Holy Law. Consider Psalm 119.

**Psalms 119:65-71** You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according

Never Again: God's Purpose For Bad Memories by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to Your promise. Teach me good judgment, wise *and* right discernment, and knowledge, for I have believed (trusted, relied on, and clung to) Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now Your word do I keep [hearing, receiving, loving, and obeying it]. You are good *and* kind and do good; teach me Your statutes. The arrogant *and* godless have put together a lie against me, but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. Their hearts are as fat as grease [their minds are dull and brutal], but I delight in Your law. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes.

David assures us that we learn to love God's Holy Law by experiencing the painful consequences and disastrous effects of lawlessness. The law does not create the pain; sin, the transgression of the law, creates the pain. The apostle Paul in Romans 7:7 has reminded us that if it had not been for the Law, we should not have recognized sin *or* have known its meaning. For instance, we would not have known about covetousness (would have had no consciousness of sin or sense of guilt) if the Law had not [repeatedly] said, You shall not covet *and* have an evil desire [for one thing and another]. As we get older, we learn to appreciate pain, because if we cannot feel it, it does not work anymore.

**Hebrews 5:8** Although He was a Son, He learned [active, Special] obedience through what He suffered.

Christ learned by what He suffered. Likewise, we learn by what we suffer. We learn to love God's Law (in letter and spirit) by experiencing the painful effects of our own lawlessness.

Jesus, while totally sinless, took on all the painful consequences of our lawbreaking, giving Him an insightful empathy into our private torture and agony as He prepared to act as our Intercessor and High Priest before God the Father.

Jesus Christ has a pass-key into all our sordid data and can feel firsthand—as no one else can—the horrific effects. As we have examined all the secret crevices of our heart before Passover, we must doggedly determine to never let these horrendous things happen again. For that reason, some residual trace memory of the wrong must remain.

The Nazi concentration camps were liberated 70 years ago in Europe. The United States Holocaust Museum, as well as the Simon Wiesenthal Center here in Los

Never Again: God's Purpose For Bad Memories by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Angeles, has a registry containing the names of 190,000 survivors. I had the honor of knowing one of these individuals, the late Coen Rood, a tailor from Longview, Texas, who back in 1998, gave me a copy of memoirs he was preparing for a publisher, a detailed account of his horrendous experiences in Nazi labor camps in Germany and Poland. Up to his dying day, he would have recurring nightmares, waking up screaming.

Sadly, I remember a church member back in the Glendale congregation in 1980, who claimed that the holocaust never happened, (just like the former president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad), but that it was all made up from film footage created on a Tel Aviv sound stage. I believe this man's worldview had been influenced by his being a part of Mussolini's Blackshirts earlier in his life.

There are reasons why Almighty God has purposed that some horrific events we have experienced not be purged from our memory banks. The first major reason God allows these unsettling trace memories to remain is to develop a hatred or abhorrence for sin, determining that we will never let that experience happen again. In Robert Jones article, "Redeeming the Bad Memories of your Past Sins", he emphasizes that "by recalling our past sins through the lens of Christ's mercy, God produces in us ongoing repentance and deepening humility." If the scars and blemishes were obliterated while we were in the flesh we would have the tendency to forget the painful consequences as had our forebears on the Sinai.

Allen Emery once told a story of a little boy named Charlie, who had the problem of habitually lying as a teenager. The boy's father, in an attempt to correct this irksome problem, told his son that every time he would tell a lie he would drive a nail into his bedroom door. After a while, the door was filled with nails, and his son had a major crisis of conscience. Charlie's father told him that he would pull a nail out every time his son told the truth. In a few months, his father was able to pull every nail from the door. When the father congratulated him, Charlie burst out into tears. His father said, "You should be smiling." The boy sobbed, and said, "True, the nails are all out, but the marks are still there." Likewise, our sins have been forgiven, but the lasting consequences from the hideous effects of sin remain. It is good that we remember the pain so we are not inclined to repeat the behavior that made us hurt in the first place.

The second major reason God wants us to retain these trace memories is to keep us back from pride. We recall Paul's thorn in the flesh:

**II Corinthians 12:7** And to keep me from being puffed up *and* too much elated by the exceeding greatness (preeminence) of these revelations, there was given me a thorn (a splinter) in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to rack

Never Again: God's Purpose For Bad Memories by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)  
*and buffet and harass me, to keep me from being excessively exalted.*

Dave Havir has mentioned frequently that the Corinthian congregation must have been a prickly bunch of people because of all the spiritual gifts it had received. With increased gifts often comes an affliction to serve as a check or balance for an over-weening pride. Our trace memories may serve as thorns in the flesh to remind us that we indeed are the lowly of the world—not the cream of the crud, but just the plain crud. When God gave Peter the power to heal through Christ's name driving out demons, as well as giving powerful sermons, we can be sure that whenever he heard a rooster crow, he experienced an involuntary shudder of horror.

The apostle Paul retained a full dossier of his past crimes against God's people, as he recounted his past blunders. In I Corinthians 15, he gives us this self-appraisal:

**I Corinthians 15:9** For I am the least [worthy] of the apostles, who am not fit *or* deserving to be called an apostle, because I once wronged *and* pursued *and* molested the church of God [oppressing it with cruelty and violence].

Back on April 11, 2015 in his sermon, "Are You Subject to Perpetual Bondage?" Martin Collins reminded us that we learn from Onesimus that the Christian is not to run away from his past, but instead to rise above it, making overcoming more of a conquest than an escape. Our father Abraham, for example, was not always the father of the faithful, but demonstrated his faithlessness in the episode with King Abimelech and with fathering Ishmael, a major contributory factor in the Islamo-facist upheaval in the Middle East and throughout the world today.

Our forefather Jacob's deceit is legendary. David, a man after God's heart, was an adulterer, a murderer, and an abject failure at basic child-rearing skills. Solomon has been castigated for his many excursions into carnality. If Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon had their peccadilloes plastered all over the scriptures, how can we latter day saints expect to sneak into God's Kingdom with squeaky clean dossiers wiped clean of our past behaviors?

One man left our fellowship several years ago, stating he did not think any of the churches had it all together. I agree with him wholeheartedly. As the late Herbert W. Armstrong said, after asking the rhetorical question, "Why are we here?" said, "Brethren, we're here because we're not all there!" And we're still not all there!

Never Again: God's Purpose For Bad Memories by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

All groups within the greater church, including ours, have things to learn and things to unlearn. We have some things right and we have made some unique contributions, but we also have blind-spots which will be clearly revealed in the fullness of time. Other groups within the greater church of God have things to learn and things to unlearn. They have all some things right and have made some unique contributions, but they also have blind-spots which will be revealed in the fullness of time, but until then we should refrain from judging them, following the apostle Paul's admonition in I Corinthians 4:5 not to make any hasty or premature judgments before the time when the Lord comes (again), for He will both bring to light the secret things that are [now hidden] in darkness and disclose and expose the [secret] aims(motives and purposes of hearts. Then every man will receive his [due] commendation from God.

Most impasses we currently have in the sheep-wars stem from our trying to remove specks out of our brother's eye while being impeded by the railroad ties in our own eyes. Because God picked us out for Himself before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), He was keenly aware of our propensity to make mistakes. Could it be that God may have called us because of our particular vulnerabilities and weaknesses so that in the fullness of time, we may serve as inspiration for others having similar problems, seeing that we have overcome those horrific problems.

We must remember that in overcoming, one size does not fit all. Charles Whittaker's area of weakness may be Dave Maas' area of strength, and, vice versa, Dave Maas' area of weakness may be Charles Whittaker's area of strength. We serve one another as we share our successes and failures in our repertoire of behaviors. When we think about it, the book of Ecclesiastes and the book of Proverbs may be the best concentrated "Been there, done that" manuals ever created. Our forebears on the Sinai sacrificed their lives so we could learn from their example—as Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 10: 6, "Now these things are examples (warnings and admonitions) for us not to desire *or* crave *or* covet *or* lust after evil *and* carnal things as they did."

Would it not be more profitable for us if we read the warning with the skull and crossbones on the back of the Sani-flush can that ingestion damages the esophagus or cause death, before we sprinkle it on our ice-cream as confetti?

Down in the swamps of Louisiana grows an herb called American Pokeweed with highly toxic fruit and leaves. Some folks discovered if they blanch the leaves repeatedly, they eventually lose their toxicity and provide some tasty green—something like spinach or mustard greens. Personally, I like the taste of poke salad, but I am glad I did not have to learn by experience, that eating poke salad after the first couple blanching's may prove fatal.

Never Again: God's Purpose For Bad Memories by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Please turn over to a millennial prophecy in Isaiah 30: Isaiah 30:20-21 And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide Himself any more, but your eyes will constantly behold your Teacher. And your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way; walk in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left.

The teachers described in verse 20 are the first-fruits, those loaves baked with leaven, as we read in Leviticus 11, verse 23. Whatever we have concealed in the secret crevices of our hearts will be purified by our repentance and shaping through trials and tests.

As we continue our daily process of repenting and overcoming, we must keep in mind, as John MacArthur stated in his article, "Nothing Safe About Secret Sin", your secret life is the real litmus test of your character: "As he thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7). Do you want to know who you really are? Take a hard look at your private life—especially your innermost thoughts.

**Revelation 12:10** Then I heard a strong (loud) voice in heaven, saying, 'Now it has come—the salvation and the power and the kingdom (the dominion, the reign) of our God, and the power (the sovereignty, the authority) of His Christ (the Messiah); for the accuser of our brethren, he who keeps bringing before our God charges against them day and night, has been cast out!'

This past half hour, I am sure that our adversary, Satan the devil has been tattling to God the secret sins and hypocrisies of mine. And even though Satan is the father of liars, I am certain that everything he has accused me of is accurate and was observed by God the Father and Jesus Christ even before Satan pointed it out. Thankfully, as we continue to remove the leavening from the inner crevices of our heart, God can even use our precipitous back-sliding for His ultimate purpose.

Joseph comforted his brothers, saying,

**Genesis 50:20** As for you, you thought evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive, as they are this day.

While we are flesh, our carnal minds render us bond-slaves to Satan. But while the prince of the power of the air intends that our hypocritical evil deeds destroy and

Never Again: God's Purpose For Bad Memories by David F. Maas (<http://www.cgg.org>)

annihilate us, God intends that our repented-of evil deed be used for good, possibly as an inspiration to help others struggling with the same horrific difficulty that has enslaved us.

To encapsulate this message, God allows us to retain bad, painful memories to instruct us about the painful consequences of sin, as checks and balances against pride, and to help others now or in the Millennium who suffer from the same weaknesses and vulnerabilities as we have experienced throughout our lives.