

Russell Kelfer

When the Memory Goes

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**Series: Possessing the Land:
The Process of Mentoring**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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To say that I am “over the hill” is a gross understatement. I’m so far “over the hill” I can’t even remember climbing the hill. In fact, it’s becoming increasingly difficult for me to even remember that I don’t remember.

They say the memory is the first thing that goes. It is. It is also the second and the third thing that goes. That’s the good thing about a couple growing old together; you both forget that you forgot about the same time.

It’s another reason we old folks like to fellowship with each other. We can interrupt each other’s conversations in mid-stream and it doesn’t offend anyone because the one we interrupted had most likely forgotten what they were saying anyhow. God is gracious that way.

There are some things, however, that God *does* expect us to remember, no matter how young or how old we are. He expects us to remember what it was like to live life without Christ. He expects us to remember the miracle of miracles when the Living Son of God came into our lives and saved us. He expects us to remember the things He has done, both great and small, to demonstrate His love and His grace and His mercy to us.

He expects us, if need be, to write them down so that when the memory begins to fail, (and eventually it does) we have a backup system to bring them back into focus. *Otherwise, when the enemy approaches us with his lies, we just might not remember to counter those lies with Truth.* When that happens, there are dreadful consequences.

THE MYTH OF THE MILITANT MAJORITY

That loss of memory and those dreadful consequences are the subject of this study as we continue our look at the book of Deuteronomy; and in particular, as we listen to Moses give his opening address. That address was to a second generation of Israelites who were about to be given an opportunity to possess the land and the life God had promised them, *an opportunity their parents had chosen to reject, based on...You guessed it...A short memory.*

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Now these grown children of that forgetful generation would face an opportunity to experience firsthand both the mercy of God and the power of God. They could experience God's mercy because He was giving His people a second chance to actually possess the land of promise, and they could experience God's power because if they, by faith, agreed to enter the land, that faith would generate God's moving on their behalf and they would see their enemies topple like sticks at the hand of Jehovah, *just the way He wanted their parents to see it.*

Moses had to begin with a history lesson to be sure that these young folks knew enough about what had happened so they wouldn't let it happen again. That's one of the great purposes of history. It is a stark reminder of what happens when principles are violated. And that is how history should be taught; not as a sea of facts to be filed in the file drawer of the mind to better equip you to play "Trivial Pursuit". It should be taught as an explanation of what happens when man follows the plan of God or when he doesn't. The patterns are clear. So God, in this brief chapter of Hebrew history, explained to them that the land had been theirs for the taking. Their Great God had given it to them as a gift. It was a part of their glorious inheritance as sons and daughters of the Most High. They were a chosen people. *He chose them because He loved them, and He loved them because He chose to.* And so it is with us.

Having said that, that prior generation of Israelites had responded with a very limited amount of faith. Here was their answer:

And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.

And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe:

And they turned and went up into the mountain, and came unto the valley of Eshcol, and searched it out.

And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the LORD our God doth give us.

Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God:

(Deuteronomy 1:22-26)

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The vote, you remember, was 10-2 in favor of skipping the whole thing. By a whopping majority, the vote of this ancient version of the CIA was “Don’t touch it on any terms. The land is okay, but the enemy is too big and too tough for us. We can’t whip him, and we’ll go down in defeat. Forget it.”

Speaking of forgetting, *that* was the problem. They had forgotten who their God was, and they had forgotten that God did not expect *them* to defeat the enemy. (God was planning to do that Himself.)

It wasn’t long before the results of the investigation hit the news stands. Soon CNN was broadcasting interviews with the returning spies and they played the same clips over and over. Let’s go back into the archives and replay them. Here is what the Hebrews heard and saw:

And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.

And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this *is* the fruit of it.

Nevertheless the people *be* strong that dwell in the land, and the cities *are* walled, *and* very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.

The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they *are* stronger than we.

And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, *is* a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it *are* men of a great stature.

And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, *which come* of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. (Numbers 13:26-33)

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They were right, you know. *They enemy was stronger than they were.* All God was asking them to do was to look at the enemy through the lens of His promises, not through the lens of their own strength. They missed it. So often, so do we. And so often, we miss the sheer blessing of watching life's little miracles because we focus the lens of our hearts on what the enemy is doing, and before long we do look like grasshoppers and Satan looks like the MVP of the NBA.

Satan will appear to be bigger than life until God comes on the scene. All God was asking His people to do was to *let Him show them what He could do to this apparently formidable enemy.* Pity. A whole generation missed that chance, *and all because they listened to the militant majority, rather than the faithful minority.* Numbers are not the criteria of choice in God's kingdom. Never have been. Never will be. His is a theocracy, not a democracy, and His kingdom is run on spiritual principles, principles that are so much higher than the ways of man, they are as much higher as heaven is above earth. That's infinity. Therefore, His prerequisites for leadership are 100 % different from man's.

Man elects by democratic rule. God selects by spiritual rules. Man chooses the best the world has to offer. God often chooses the foolish of this world to confound the wise. Man selects based on ability. God chooses based on character. Don't elect deacons or elders or spiritual leaders in your congregation or hire pastors based on their success in the world. Choose them based on integrity and spiritual maturity. Man chooses based on how well they fare in the marketplace. God chooses by how well they fare in the quiet place. Man wants men who know how to use their words. God wants men who know how to obey His Word.

So a ten to two report that violates the principles of the word will not be an unusual occurrence, even among God's people. Unless you are saturated with God's word, the choices you make will most likely reflect the society around you, rather than the God above you or His Spirit inside you. We simply react to our emotions more quickly than we respond to God's Spirit. Look at what happened when the latest Gallup poll came out. The entire nation went with the majority. It always does. We are like sheep who have gone astray.

Public opinion desperately wants to gravitate away from the principles of Scripture. The concept of responding to an image

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rather than reflecting an attitude is contrary to the heart of fallen man. It is so crucial that churches be quietly patient in their quest for spiritual leadership. They must not “take what’s available”. They must wait on God for men who wait on God. Those who have His mind can delegate tasks, but only those who have His mind can make wise decisions. And His thoughts and His ways are not slightly different from man’s. They are 180 degrees different; as different as heaven is from earth, *and they always will be*.

If men or women want to check out the land and come back and tell you “it can’t be done” or “it can’t be done God’s way because times have changed” don’t be surprised. But don’t listen, either. Some methods may change, *but the principles of God’s word will never change*. And man wants desperately to confuse the two.

A generation has now passed. Years of desperation and despair in the wilderness have brought them low. They, no doubt, had changed their hairdos, were watching different television shows, were struggling with different issues. I don’t know. One thing I do know, however: They had the very same choices their fathers had. And the pressures to rebel were the same as well.

THE REASONS AND RESULTS OF REBELLION

Speaking of rebelling, that was God’s sentence of judgement on the prior generation.

Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God:

(Deuteronomy 1:26)

We sometimes misunderstand that word “rebel”. We can grasp that God thinks we’re rebellious if we kick the traces and commit some heinous crime or if our behavior reveals that we have some great moral violation we have been hiding. But those are the “fruits of rebellion”. Rebellion is a heart attitude that involves any thought or activity that departs from God’s best. Look at some examples from Scripture:

Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not.

(Numbers 14:9)

Here, then, is our present example. They had rebelled against the commandment of the Lord. They were simply being asked by God to act in faith to do something that would ultimately bring

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God's will to pass in their lives. They had prayed for God's will to be done, *and then when He gave them instructions as to how to accomplish that plan, they rebelled*. What did they do? They simply said, "No, Lord, let's do it differently." The great rebellion in your life may well not be some great overt sin. Your wandering in the Christian life may not be the result of immorality or idolatry in the normal sense of the word. God may simply have quietly said to you: "This is the way. Walk ye in it," and you may have said, "No way, Lord, there are giants in that land. I'll take this little detour." By refusing to trust God to not only direct you but care for you, and by refusing to believe that His strange, slow, higher ways are really best, you have rebelled.

A second way we rebel is by bending or ignoring parts of God's word.

Whosoever *he be* that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage. (Joshua 1:18)

"Hearken in all". What a simple solution. Just take God at His word. And don't try to twist your way out of certain commandments just because everyone else in your day does so. It is so easy to "generalize" Scripture. That means you determine that "generally" God wants to do it that way, *but there are always exceptions*. That gives you the right to determine if you are the exception of the moment, *which in effect makes you God*.

A third way we rebel is even more subtle.

Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD?

But that ye must turn away this day from following the LORD? and it will be, *seeing* ye rebel to day against the LORD, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.

Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession *be* unclean, *then* pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the LORD, wherein the LORD's tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the LORD, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the LORD our God. (Joshua 22:16,18,19)

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We are in rebellion when we “build an altar beside the altar of the LORD.” Perhaps the greatest source of rebellion in our day is the rebellion of compromise. We allow other things to co-inhabit the throne room of our lives. We “love the Lord our God with most of our hearts, and most of our souls, and most of our minds”. And, we surmise, in this busy, complicated world we live in, *that ought to make Him happy*. It doesn't. Because it robs us of the life we were meant to live, which is a life that is so focused on one thing, so committed to One Person, so absorbed in one passion, that nothing but Christ matters. And it is the gentle, almost silent magnetism of materialism and worldly success that seems to steal our hearts without our realizing it.

The children of Israel wanted to inherit the land. They wanted all God had for them. They, however, surmised that *it was up to them to determine whether or not God was being realistic in His instructions*. They took a vote. Sure enough, God had, they almost unanimously agreed, overlooked some things. There were giants in that land. And next to those giants, God's people were like grasshoppers. Or so it seemed. God got it *almost right*, they decided. The land really was a winner. Wow. Too bad He missed it on the second round. It was a good idea, but the plan was faulty. Or so they thought.

Oh, beloved, *that's where we miss it*. God has a plan for each of us to take us into that land of peace and joy and victory. And yes, the Scripture guarantees us those things. And so we pray. And so God answers. “Here is the land,” He whispers, “Let's go.”

“But, Lord,” we whine, “Not that way. That direction leads to pain and suffering and disappointment and persecution. That direction leads into dark tunnels and through valleys of weakness and weariness. Lord, let's take the 'high' road. Let's get as much peace and as much joy and as much victory as we can *without the suffering*. I know. “In this world ye shall have tribulation”. I know. “The trying of our faith worketh patience”. I know. “Your strength is made perfect in weakness”. But Lord, *that's not my concept of victory*. The land looks good, but the giants are too big. I love you, *but I choose to go some other way.*”

Aren't you glad Jesus didn't choose to go *some other way than by way of the Cross*? And aren't you glad that God in His mercy didn't intervene when He said, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” and take a shortcut? Without the Cross,

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we would have nothing. And without the deeper valleys of life, we would miss the heights. Oh, dear God, what fools we are. We want the land, *but we don't want to make the journey through the mine fields of adversity to possess it.* So we *rebel* against the Lord, simply by ignoring His call to walk the road of faith.

THE MISERY OF MISSING MEMORY

Yes, there are giants in the land. *There will always be giants in the land.* They are there so we can experience the victory of seeing giants fall. Were there no giants, there would be no battle. Were there no battle, there would be no dependence. Were there no dependence, there would be no surrender. Were there no surrender, there would be no release of power on our behalf and we would never see the land of victory. The very word “victory” means to triumph in conflict. You can't have one without the other.

What was their problem? And what is ours? Why do we not rather rejoice at the thought of the battle, knowing it is the battle that leads to the crown? I'll tell you why. No, on second thought, let's let God tell us why. Let's return to verse 27:

And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.

Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.

Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them.

The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes;

And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.

Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God,

Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.

(Deuteronomy 1:27-33)

Their computer disk had crashed and they didn't have a good recovery program. They had a God who had allowed them

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to suffer in Egypt and had walked beside them through their wilderness wanderings as a Father walks beside a son he loves. He let them suffer so He could comfort them. He let them weep so He could console them. He let them be afflicted and persecuted and rejected so they would crawl up into His loving arms and find refuge there. Underneath were the everlasting arms. But they had forgotten.

They had experienced a lifetime of living and a lifetime of loving at the hand of a God whose middle name was love, *but they couldn't recall it*. God had taken them through valleys deep because deep valleys lead to deep faith. He had taken them through pain and suffering because pain and suffering lead to determination. He had taken them through ridicule and rejection because ridicule and rejection lead to humility and trust. He loved them so much He had not only taken them into the battle, *He had walked with them through the very heart of the battle and on to the other side where a victor's crown awaited them*. Yet they remembered not.

Beloved, there is an apparent vacuum in the mind of man where God is concerned. We can remember the score of a basketball game that was played ten years ago, but can't remember the incredible things God did for us last month. We have perfect recall when it comes to the positive exploits of our children or grandchildren, but when it comes to what God has done for His children, we draw a blank. Because we can't remember past victories, we don't have a grid from which to make present decisions.

This was God's argument to the children of Israel. How could they so soon forget? The same way we do. Victims of the "God Vacuum". Have you ever stopped to ponder what God was saying to them? It would be a good idea. He may be saying the same thing to you. It was a three-fold reminder:

- 1- Don't you remember what I did for you in Egypt? (30)
- 2- Don't you remember what I did for you in the wilderness? (31)
- 3- Don't you remember how I led you night and day? (33)

The bottom line was: "Don't you remember?" Now, think about it carefully. Egypt. The wilderness. Not necessarily the epitome of Israeli high points in the story of their existence. No one would choose to relive either of those experiences again, given a choice.

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The truth was, however, that God had chosen those two dungeon-like experiences as a showcase for His glory, *and the miracles He had performed during those crucial years of their history were, indeed, to be awesome reminders forever of both His power and His love.*

Imagine seeing such things as water come from a rock, seas part, a rod turned into a serpent, a river turned to blood, flies, locusts, hail come from nowhere; bread come down from heaven, quail fill the skies, What an awesome display of power.

You might be saying, “If God were to let me witness things like that, I would trust Him no matter what.” No you wouldn’t. The disciples witnessed more miracles than the nation of Israel did. Yet still they were filled with unbelief. Luke 16:30 reminds us that if you cannot simply take God at His word, you will not believe, though one be raised from the dead. Indeed.

There are several reasons miracles alone are not enough.

1- The flesh sees that miracles call attention to themselves. (If you talk enough about the miracles, you tend to forget to give the glory to God which is the only reason for miracles in the first place).

2- Miracles can be self-perpetuating. The “What have you done lately, Lord?” syndrome seems to always recur. A miracle demands a greater miracle for it to be recognized. Before long, presumption becomes commonplace.

3- The mind of man has a short memory. The word is transforming, absolute, and eternal. Miracles are temporary, physical, and tend to glorify the flesh. This is the key to the whole of this message.

There was, however, an even deeper word from God here. Not only was He reminding this ungrateful, forgetful group of wanderers about the miraculous ways God had ministered to them in Egypt and in the wilderness, *He was reminding them of something even more important.* He had led them step by step, day by day, hour by hour, by the pillar of fire and the cloud, *and never did they need to doubt that He was the One doing the leading.*

And this may be the most incredible lesson of all. We may forget the miracles, *though it seems incredible that we could forget,* but how can we forget the way He has protected us, encouraged

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us, directed us, delivered us, instructed us, and loved us in a thousand ways?

That pillar has been replaced with an indwelling Spirit who never leaves us or forsakes us. He leads us by day and by night. He convicts us, He reproofs us, He redirects us. These are indeed the real miracles. Were His every move on our behalf to be recorded and reviewed, would there be room enough on planet earth for the record of them? The “little” miracles: that phone call, that letter, that moment in time when all of life was on the line. That word of encouragement that lifted itself off the pages of Scripture and spoke so powerfully to our heart on that day when the oppression was beyond our understanding. That intervention that took place when God moved in and brought someone into your life that changed your life *at the very moment in time that only could be explained by God’s love.*

Are not the greatest miracles of all really only the outworking of the quiet daily leading of God’s Spirit? Ought we not to stand in awe minute by minute at the way “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about us and delivereth us”? Instead of being angry at God because we got sick, ought we not to marvel that in a world riddled by sin and so influenced by Satan and sickness that we have a day in our lives without pain or anguish? Why are we so presumptuous? What makes us think that with millions dying around the world each year of starvation, God owes us better homes, better cars, new clothes, and a break on our taxes?

Why do we not see the tiny little handwritten love letters God writes in our book of remembrances every day? How can we complain so much and be in awe so seldom of His incredible leading through the maze of life’s issues and problems, failing to take note and failing to remember them even so much as a day or so later?

God led the children of Israel day after day and night after night. Never did they not physically see the pillar and the cloud. Never. And never is God’s Spirit not evident in His leading in our lives. Never. The children of Israel kept forgetting. So do we. The children of Israel, having forgotten, *made some really big mistakes.* So do we. They were the victims of unbelief and rebellion. So are we. They said to God, “Thanks for what you’ve done, but we can’t trust you this time. There’s too much at stake, here. We’ve voted unanimously to disobey your orders, because

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we think you hate us and are trying to trick us to destroy us. So there, God.”

Brokenhearted, God said to them: “Oh, what short memories you have. All these years, I have cared for you. I have loved you. I have protected you. Yes, I let you suffer the consequences of your sins, but even then I loved you as a father loves a rebellious son, and never did I give up caring for you. Never. How dare you say I don’t love you. Don’t you remember? Egypt? The wilderness? The pillar of fire and the cloud? What was that all about, anyway? Coincidence? Fate? Dear, dear children, *don’t you remember?*”

Down through the ages, the story has been rewritten millions of times. Again and again, God has loved His children, disciplined His children, led His children, and protected His children, only to have them say to Him, “How can I trust you in this situation, Lord? There are giants in the land, and I’m not about to believe you this time.”

Oh, we don’t always say it that plainly. But as we turn our backs on His plan and run from the warfare He intentionally leads us into, we are, in effect, saying: “*You don’t love me and I can’t trust you.*” And all because we have fallen into that ocean called forgetfulness and allowed Satan to snatch from the hard disks of our hearts that precious data marked “*God’s leading and God’s love*”. With that data gone, we have lost much of what God wants to use to keep our confidence in Him. Psalm 77 said it so well:

I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old.

I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.

(Psalm 77:11,12)

There was an old World War II song that went, “We did it before and we can do it again and we will do it again.” We need to rewrite those lyrics. They ought to read: “He did it before and He can do it again and He will do it again” (if we by faith, will only let Him.) It’s what He longs to do. God longs to lead us into the land of the victorious Christian life just as He did the children of Israel so long ago. An entire generation never experienced that victory because they were afraid to experience the warfare necessary to be victorious. In the process, they doomed a generation of children to be raised in the wilderness, as well. Had that generation, so filled with unbelief, only learned to sing that song. He had done it before. In Egypt, in the wilderness, He had performed miracle

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after miracle to satisfy their thirst for the supernatural, and He had led them day by day and night by night by a pillar of fire and a cloud, to satisfy their need to know that God was taking them every step of the way through both the valleys and mountaintops of life.

He *had* done it before. And He would do it again, if only they would search the computers of their minds and recall His provisions in days gone by. Had they done so, they would have known what to do. They wouldn't have needed search teams, committee meetings, and 10-2 votes against going. They would have cried, "He *will* do it again. Let's go!" And the land would have belonged to this congregation a generation ago.

But what about you? What are you doing to remember both the miracles and the day to day leading of God in your life and the lives of others? You have watched Him part the rivers of circumstance, bring the Living Water from the Rock of Ages into new hearts, and send manna from heaven at just the perfect time to feed hungry souls. And have you not seen Him lead you day by day as His Spirit took you by the hand and spoke through His Word, or rearranged life's happenings so that the very timing of what was *naturally* happening became a *supernatural* happening?

If you don't have an archive of God's working in your life, why not go back and begin to recall the miracles He has performed in your life, beginning with the process of leading you from darkness into light? And why not catalog it so you can, when Satan begins to quote His version of Philippians 4:8, begin to share "whatsoever things are true" from your own journal of victories? It's not difficult. It doesn't require a degree in history. Just a little notebook, some blank pages, and a pencil. And why not begin tomorrow to journal or catalog or record *every little thing God does along the way in your life from now on that you would like to someday recall to your children, or have God recall to you, so that you will never again have to hear God say to you, "Don't you remember?"*

Instead, you can joyfully walk through life proclaiming: "My God did it before and He can do it again, and He *will* do it again. This is what He did. Dear God, I trust you. And now, even when my memory goes, I need not go...astray."

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For Further Study and Application

1- Why does the “majority report” where spiritual things are concerned, so often not line up with God’s word?

2- What dynamic seems to cause the multitudes to always vote against that which requires real faith?

3- Even the majority report was favorable as far as the promises were concerned. The land looked good. What then, was their problem?

4- Why did Moses say they rebelled? What had they forgotten? How did God feel about what they had forgotten? How do you think God feels about your forgetting what He has done for you?

5- Have you ever shared your testimony about how you came to Christ with your family or those you work with? Is it still fresh in your mind? When was the last time you wrote it out to remind you, not only of the glory of your salvation, but also of the wonderful way God led you up to that point, using even your rebellion to create a need?

6- What do you think it means to “murmur”? Are you a murmurer? What kinds of things do you murmur about? Does the underlying thought behind your murmuring (though you would never say it out loud) seem to imply that God doesn’t really love you? Where is the first time in Scripture we read that lie?

7- How conscious are you as you walk through an average day of the ways God is leading you? Do you stop through the day and thank Him for the “little” miracles He does to show you that He cares? Do you call out to Him throughout the day and thank Him that He is in control of the “all things of life”?

8- Do you have a journal or “Book of Remembrance” in which you recall the things both great and small that God is doing? Are you willing to start one today? Memorize Psalm 77:11,12.

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10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

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