

Repetition and Reminders

2 Peter 1:12-15

After college Brenda and I worked at a Christian youth camp in South Mississippi. Every morning before breakfast all the kids were lined up outside the “mess hall” and one of the counselors would shout out, “What’s the #1 rule at King’s Arrow Ranch?” The kids would shout at the top of their lungs, “To have fun!” We figured that if they were having fun that they’d be receptive to spiritual truth along the way.

And so in the midst of fun games and activities our counselors gave object lessons. For example, in archery class the counselors would teach about safety, about how to hold the bow so the string doesn’t hit your arm, how to pull the string back with your fingers, how to anchor your hand right below your cheek bone, how to aim at the target, etc. After all this instruction, the counselor is ready to demonstrate how to shoot an arrow. The counselor loads up the arrow, pulls back the string ready to shoot. . . . The anticipation is thick in the air. . . but then the counselor relaxes the string, lowers the bow and says, “You know, if my aim is just a few degrees ‘off’ it may not seem like much, but by the time the arrow gets all the way down there it may miss the target completely. The same thing is true of your lives. When you’re ten years old sin may not seem like a big deal, but if sin goes unchecked at your age, when you’re my age you might ‘miss the target’ completely.” Then he loads up the bow and shoots the arrow.

I have no idea whether or not the kids got anything out of that object lesson. But it has stayed with me for the last 30 years! That’s largely because I heard that object lesson repeated over and over and over. That’s the power of repetition. Chances are that you can remember things that your parents or others taught you repeatedly. That’s the way we learn almost everything - by repetition.

Today - on this last Sunday in 2012 - we are going to look at a passage of Scripture that articulates the importance of repetition and reminders in our spiritual life. In 2 Peter 1:12-15 Peter explains how he wants his words to echo in the minds of his readers long after he was gone. This is what he writes:

12 Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and have been established in the truth which is present with *you*. 13 I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 knowing that the laying aside of my *earthly* dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

In these verses we not only see **that** Peter wanted his readers to learn the truth deeply. We also gain insight into Peter's method. His method involved **repetition** - telling them things that they already knew. He understood that people need to hear and accept the truth over and over again if they are to learn it deeply. This principle is relevant for each of us as we consider our own spiritual growth and as we consider how we influence the spiritual growth of others.

The Importance of Repetition and Reminders in Spiritual Growth (2 Peter 1:12-15)

Peter acknowledges right off the bat that he is writing familiar things to them:

12 Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you *already* know *them*, and have been established in the truth which is present with *you*.

Peter probably couldn't have written this statement to a lot of churches in his day. But these believers already "knew" what he had written so far in chapter 1: that they would grow in grace and peace through the knowledge of God; they knew that God had granted them everything pertaining to life and godliness; they know that they needed to be diligent in seeking God. Peter says that they "[had] been established in the truth which [was] present with [them]." They had been anchored by the truth of Christianity (i.e., Christian doctrine) that they possessed. Doctrine has the ability to do just that: strengthen and establish us in the faith.

The critical thing for us to notice is that even though they "knew" the truth and had been "established" in it, Peter was insistent that they still needed reminders: *I will always be ready to remind you of these things*. They needed to hear again the truths that were already theirs. In verse 13 Peter writes that such reminders are important to "stir [them] up" or to "refresh [their] memory."

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In some way Jesus had made it clear to Peter that his days on earth were coming to a close. We know that Peter was eventually crucified upside down in Rome. Peter knew that the most strategic thing he could do while still on earth was to remind these believers of these truths so as to rekindle their zeal for seeking after "a knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."

We see in verse 15 that Peter is thinking far beyond the immediate impact of his reminder:

15 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

Even after he had folded up his tent and gone home to God, Peter wanted his readers to be able to recall the things he had taught them. This is the heart's desire of any good teacher, shepherd, or spiritual leader - to have an ongoing, lasting impact in the lives of those they care about. That's why Peter was so diligent to remind them of things that they already knew.

The ***basic perspective here*** is that ***we need to be reminded of spiritual truth that we already "know."*** In a practical sense we "forget" things that we've learned in the

past. We need to be stirred up by way of reminder. Our minds and our hearts reconnect with these truths and our wills are moved toward obedience.

This perspective is put forth in numerous places in the Scriptures. In the book of Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are challenged to remember what God had done in delivering them from bondage in Egypt. Instead of entering the Promised Land and becoming complacent and self-sufficient, they were supposed to recall what God had done. The Passover celebration, for example, was a graphic reminder of what God had done. Year after year they rehearsed in their hearts and minds God's deliverance from Egypt; they needed such a reminder so that they didn't wander from the truths they had already learned about God. Our celebration of the Lord's table each month serves a similar function. Jesus said that we were supposed to eat the bread and drink the cup "in remembrance" of Him.

In Paul's writings we find this same emphasis upon repetition and remembering. In Romans 15 Paul wrote this:

14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. 15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again . . .

Paul wasn't afraid to repeat himself because he knew that believers need to be reminded of spiritual truth they already "know." Like Peter, he sought to stir them up by way of reminder.

We read in Jude 5:

5 Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe.

Jude readily acknowledged that he wasn't teaching anything new. He was reminding his readers of a principle from the Old Testament that they knew well.

Very simply, ***we each need repeated reminders of spiritual truth in order to grow in Christ.***

I am ***not*** saying that we only need to learn a few basic truths and "call it good." I am not saying that we don't need to study the Scriptures and think deeply about how the truths we find there apply to our lives, our work, and to the significant issues that face our world. The author of Hebrews points out that just as a baby moves from drinking milk only to eating solid food, so too believers should eventually be able to assimilate the "solid food" of God's word. Earlier in 2 Peter 1 (in verse 5) Peter had pointed out that we need to add ***knowledge*** to our faith. We should excel in study and in the life of the mind.

I **am** saying that when it comes to spiritual growth, repetition is essential. We need to be brought back time and again to make sure that we haven't drifted from the foundational truths and practices essential to spiritual growth. I want us to spend a few minutes now exploring a couple of questions raised by this idea that repetition is essential for spiritual growth.

Implications:

How should this realization affect the way we pursue spiritual growth?

It is very possible that the most important truth you hear this coming year might just be something that you've known for years and years. We should be ever attentive to those same Scriptures and those same truths that God has used in our lives in the past. We never graduate from any passage of Scripture. The truth strikes us differently at different times in our lives and in different circumstances. The truth remains the same, but the significance of that truth can vary. Therefore we need repetition.

This past year one of the things to which I've returned time and again is the basic truth taught in 1 Corinthians 13 - the "love chapter." I've read this passage dozens of times; I've taught this passage numerous times; I've heard it taught numerous times. But this past year I've been brought back time and again to the basic truth that in the kingdom of God what matters most isn't spiritual gifting, knowledge, or even sacrifice. Those things are important in context, but without love gifts, knowledge and sacrifice are worthless; they don't accomplish the purposes of God. I'm brought back to the basic truth that as a husband, a dad, a son, a brother, a pastor, and a friend, what really matters is whether or not I've shown love.

As Paul explained, I can evaluate whether or not I've been loving by whether or not I've been patient and kind. . . or whether I've been jealous or arrogant or provoked . . . or whether I've held grudges. Even though this passage is so very familiar, I need to be reminded and therefor stirred up by its teaching year after year. That's what Peter knew so well about the Christian life - that believers need to be stirred up by things that they already know. That's why he didn't hesitate to write them again about the importance of ***practicing*** things like moral excellence, self-control, perseverance, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Peter 1).

My encouragement to each of us is to be attentive to what God might say to you through Scriptures that you've known for years. Resist the tendency to "check out" when you're reading a passage of Scripture that is very familiar to you. There is a reason why certain Scriptures are very familiar - they contain truths that need to be revisited time and time again.

How should this realization affect the way we seek to influence others spiritually?

Think of another person(s) you are seeking to influence spiritually: another brother or sister in Christ, your children, those in a Bible study you're leading, etc. Peter's attitude toward his readers should be ***our*** attitude toward those we're trying to influence spiritually. We shouldn't be afraid of repetition and reminder. We should be eager to stir others up by reminding them of truths they already know. We should make every effort

to communicate the truth in such a way that they can remember it long after they've heard it.

This is really a foundational perspective on how Brian and I try to influence you each week through teaching the Scriptures. We don't feel any great pressure to teach things that nobody has ever heard before. We do try to present things in fresh and insightful ways, but many of you have already heard almost everything that we teach. Many of you (like Peter's audience) already "know the truth and are established in it."

For example, when we taught the series on "The Word" this past fall, very few of you thought, "I had no idea that 'all Scripture is inspired by God' and is 'profitable for teaching, reproof, rebuke, and training in righteousness.'" You may have heard some new insights along the way, but it was largely a reminder of things you already knew. Through repetition we tried to stir you up to seek God in new and fresh ways.

Those of us who are parents influence our children through repetition and reminders. In the early chapters of Proverbs you have a dad appealing to his son to remember what "mom and dad" have taught him. And so we repeat the same truths over and over again, urging our children to apply that truth afresh as their circumstances change. Wise parents will realize that their children don't "get it" the first time (just like we didn't "get it" and still don't "get it" the first time). Wise parents avoid a ticked-off "if-I've-told-you-once-I've-told-you-a-hundred-times" attitude; wise parents patiently repeat whatever needs to be repeated. Wise parents allow their children to see their lives and see how they are returning to the same truths that they've known for years. Children are much more likely to learn from our repetition if they know that we are still be stirred up by truth that we've heard many, many times. Our children don't merely listen to our words; they listen to our lives. If we're people who are taught by repetition and reminders, perhaps our children will be also.

If you want to influence others spiritually, consider the importance of repetition and reminding. This isn't a matter of technique, but of spiritual depth. All too often we're a mile wide and an inch deep when it comes to matters of the Spirit. But through receiving and applying the same Scriptures and the same spiritual truths over and over again – and urging others to do the same – we grow in the knowledge of God and of Jesus. All of this matters because knowing God can shape the quality and impact of our lives more than anything else.