

Bible reading: Philippians 1:3-9 (NT page 1178)
Reader: Robert Alexander

Reflection on the Bible passage

The text verse for the reflection is verse 3: “I thank my God every time I remember you”.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is written at a particular dark and difficult moment in his life. He is imprisoned and expecting execution. Yet the tone of the letter reflects thankfulness, joy and confidence, especially when he remembers all the things of the present, and past. His capacity to remember seems to lift him beyond his circumstances. He remembers the care and affection of his friends in Philippi. He remembers the things God has been doing in and through THEIR good will . He remembers their common purpose of sharing the Gospel. He remembers that God will be with him no matter what. He knows that God is with him in his bad circumstances. He has the true and certain hope of inheriting the kingdom of God because of his faith in the redemption, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. These thoughts made him thank God.

But I am sure not all his memories were so positive. I am sure he must have thought of his life before God called him into a life of faith. He must have been feeling a wee bit guilty towards all the people that he prosecuted and persecuted just because they had faith. As he reflected on his own condition, he must have realised the suffering and injustice that he was once the cause of.

But he knew that God is a loving and forgiving God. All through his letters, we read about God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness. He learned from experience that God could offer healing, restoration and a new start.

It is no wonder that he could say the words: “I thank my God every time I remember you” despite his circumstances.

In modern times psychologists have emphasized the importance of keeping memories alive in times of mourning and grief. And to help people with keeping these memories alive, they came up with the idea of having a memory box where you can put in all the things that remind you of your loved ones that has passed away like a photo, a wedding ring, a watch or a dried flower - anything really that can fit into the memory box.

We have handed each bereaved family a memory box this afternoon to help you to keep your memories alive.

Why?

Well our memories is the only link we have with our loved ones. By keeping our memories vivid and alive, we have the link. And mostly our memories will be full of live wonderful moments, full of laughter but sometimes also covered with sorrow especially when it comes to special times such as a birthday, or an anniversary or family occasion or Christmas.

Sometimes memories can also be tinged with a sense of guilt; wondering if we could have done more; wishing we might have made more of our parting; or perhaps even feeling guilty that we have survived when others haven't.

Sometimes we prefer not to remember especially when we are the victims of tragedy. Blanking out particularly traumatic memories is one of the ways our human minds cope with some of the particularly unpleasant things that happen to people. But even when we have the capacity to remember, we sometimes prefer not to – believing that if we can somehow blank out the memories, then we can blank out the pain of what we have lost.

But memory is a gift to us, it is that part of a loved one or friend that can never be taken from us. Our memories of them can be part of the healing process.

For some of us here, the pain of loss and parting might be so great that we too struggle to believe that we have anything to thank God for. But God has given us the capacity to remember, and He invites us to use those

memories not to rub salt into the wounds of the present, but to discover that even in our present struggles and pain we can find cause to be thankful. And as we express our thanks to Him, so we begin to discover His presence, giving us the strength and healing that we need.

Remembering might not be easy, that's why perhaps for generations people have come together in acts of remembrance, supporting and helping one another in the struggle and need. But let us use the memories of the past to find God in the present. Let's not be afraid to shed the odd tear, or even express our anger and despair to God – he does not demand of us that we come to him in a state of polite composure. But through remembering; sharing our stories; laughing and crying together we will find the strength for each new day's challenge.

Remembering our loved ones might be painful, but forgetting them or allowing others to forget them would be a far greater tragedy. So as we share this act of remembrance let us pray that by God's grace we might reach that place where like Paul, we can look back and say *"I thank my God, every time I remember you"*

Amen