

What Does 2 Peter 1:9 Mean?

2 Peter 1:9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has become forgetful of the cleansing of his past sins.

“Them” refers to the list of virtues in verses 5-7, which describe what verse 4 means by sharing in the divine nature. If you are not growing in godliness, it’s a vision problem and a memory problem. To restart your growth, open your spiritual eyes (think deeply) and remember your past cleansing.

Betrayed by Your Brain: Why You Recall Sin but Forget God’s Grace

2 Peter Part 12

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2 Peter 1:5 For this very reason, having made every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you

from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has become forgetful of the cleansing of his past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers, make every effort to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you. 12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.

Introduction: Good Memory/Evil Memory

How good is your memory? Before you answer, let me ask this—do you know the definition of a good memory? Most people would say, “It’s when you can recall what you want to recall—people’s names, events, important facts. It’s the ability to bring to mind lots of information.”

Is that a good memory? It might be good. Or it might be evil. The biblical definition of a good memory isn’t about *how much* information you can remember ; it’s about *which* information you remember. God designed your brain so that it forgets the vast majority of what comes into it. And which things you remember and which things you forget will determine how much success or failure you’ll have in the Christian life.

Just like every other part of us, our memories are affected by sin. You learn a hard lesson—a painful lesson, and then what happens? You forget, and you have to learn it again. How many times have you said, “Man, I’m never going to do that again!” “A whole tub of ice cream in one sitting? Never again! I’ve learned my lesson.”

Your Judas Memory

Then what happens? Your Judas memory betrays you. You completely forget what made you say, “Never again.” But you remember the taste of that ice cream like it was yesterday.

How about when someone hurts you—what does your memory naturally do? You forget what God’s Word says about bitterness and anger, you forget all the misery that vengeful attitudes have caused you—you forget all that, but you have an encyclopedic memory of what people did to hurt you—even the exact words they said 20 years ago. This is human nature. We forget all the painful consequences of sin, but we have a photographic memory of the pleasures of those sins. We remember what people have done and we forget what God has done. At every turn, our Judas memories betray us.¹

Every Christian struggles with this. Even David had to preach to his soul and call upon his soul to forget not the Lord’s benefits (Ps.103).

The Importance of Memory

Forgetting truth about God will cause all kinds of sin in your life.

And also fear. If you’re afraid, it’s because you’re forgetting some things about God.

Isaiah 51:12 ... Who are you that you fear mortal men ... 13 that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.

¹ The reason Israel turned away from God was because of a memory problem. God warned them over and over—“Don’t forget what it was like to be slaves, and don’t forget what I did to deliver you.” And what happened? **Psalm 78:11 They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.** They forgot everything God told them to remember. But they did remember one thing. **Numbers 11:5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost— also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.** They forgot the misery of their bondage. But they remembered the food.

Forgetting can mess you up in so many ways. So all through the OT God tells the people, “Build a monument, tell your children, have a festival”—all the rituals and ceremonies, the whole sacrificial system—it was all to help the people remember.

And in the NT, our one recurring ceremony—communion. And what is that? A remembrance (“Do this in remembrance of me”). Maybe you believe it’s more than a remembrance, but it’s certainly not less than a remembrance.

And what is the whole book of 2 Peter? A reminder—just like 1 Peter.

2 Peter 3:1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders... 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior.

2 Peter 1:12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them ... 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory ... 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

Remembering and forgetting is huge.

Two Kinds of Forgetting

And keep in mind, there’s more than one kind of forgetting. There’s the kind where you *can’t* recall. (“What is that guy’s name? I can’t think of it.”)

That’s one kind—the other kind is when you could easily recall the information if you tried, but it just doesn’t come to mind in the moment you need it. I tell my wife I’ll pick up eggs on the way home, but I drive right past King Soopers. And if you asked me right then, “Darrell, did you say you would get eggs?” I would easily remember. “Oh yeah—that’s right.” The information is there in my head, it just doesn’t come to mind when I need it to. And that’s the kind of forgetting Peter warns us about in 2 Peter 1:9.

Forgetting and Stunted Growth

Peter’s Diagnosis

When we go to Pastor Peter/counselor Peter and say, “Hey, my spiritual growth has stalled out. Can you tell me what’s wrong with me?” He says, “Yeah, I’ll tell you exactly what’s wrong—two things. it’s your vision and your memory.”

2 Peter 1:9 If anyone does not have [increasing virtues], he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten he has been cleansed from his past sins.

The Digestion Problem

We talked about the vision part last time, and I gave you an illustration about a baby that isn’t growing and the doctor says he has a vision problem and a *digestion* problem. When I said that last time, you might have looked at the verse and thought, “Wait a minute. Shouldn’t it be a vision problem and a memory problem? Why did Darrell call it a digestion problem?”

I said that because if you think about it, that’s really what this kind of memory problem is. It’s not like you’re sitting around trying to recall, “Did God cleanse me or not—I can’t remember.” It’s that other kind of forgetting, where you know it, but it doesn’t come to mind in the moment you need it. And that kind of memory problem happens when you learn something but don’t fully digest it so it becomes a part of you.

When you digest a truth, that truth will affect your whole way of looking at the world—the way you interpret everything that happens around you. A perfect example is your understanding of gravity. You think you're forgetful—let me ask you—have you ever forgotten about gravity? You just walked off a building and as you're plummeting toward the pavement you say, "Ah! That's right—gravity! I keep forgetting." No, you take gravity into consideration with every movement you ever make. When you get out of bed, toss something in the trash, take a drink of water—everything. You don't consciously think about it, but you've digested that truth so thoroughly that it affects your every action and your whole perspective on the world.

And Peter's saying, "If you're not growing, there's something you haven't really digested." And he connects that with being spiritually nearsighted, because those two problems always go together.

Forgetting and Blindness

Peter learned that from Jesus. When Jesus rebuked Peter and the other disciples for being blind, he also mentioned forgetting.

Mark 8:18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?

Vision problem—memory problem. Spiritual nearsightedness and forgetting go together because nearsightedness means you don't look closely enough and give enough attention to spiritual truths. And looking closely and giving attention is what causes digestion so that you don't forget. So failure to look deeply will result in forgetting.

We see that same connection between looking and remembering in James 1.

James 1:23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does.

He's making the same point as Peter. If you're not living out the virtues of the Christian life, it's because of a memory problem. And the memory problem is due to a vision problem—a failure to look intently. That word means to stoop down and really examine something. Fail to do that, and the truths you learn won't sink in and you get spiritual dementia.

You start behaving as though gravity didn't exist.

- The gravity of God's holiness or love or his food-likeness
- the gravity of treasure in heaven.
- the gravity of the fact that "It's better to give than to receive" or

You learned all those truths, but you didn't gaze at them long enough and deeply enough to really digest them so they become like the law of gravity in your heart.

Relevance

Both Peter and James connect the intensive looking and remembering to doing. When you put a principle into practice—that's when it really sinks in because that's where you see how its relevance.

No principle really sinks in until it becomes relevant to you. If you learn something, but you can't answer the question, "So what?" then your brain will set that fact aside. Nothing sticks in your memory until you can see how it fits in with all the other stuff you know. Your memory isn't like a

library, where a book can just sit on a shelf by itself. It's more like a machine, where each gear has to connect with some other gears in order to be useful.

No fact is useful by itself. It's only useful when you know how it's connected to other facts. It's not enough to just understand about the strength of gravity. I also need to understand the hardness of pavement. Those two principles go together. Because if I understand all about gravity but don't have a good grasp of the hardness of pavement, I might still walk off a building.

This has been really good for me to study this because I always think I need to learn something new. And sometimes that is what we need—some principle in the Bible that we never learned before. But most of the time we have all the pieces in our head already, but we just haven't figured out where that gear goes in the machine.

Maybe this problem I have requires 5 biblical principles for me to overcome it, and I've learned all 5. But I'm still not getting victory because by the time I learned #3, forgot #1, then learned 4 and 5 but forgot 3. And I need someone like you to come to me and say, "Darrell, remember principles #1&3."

When you remind me of principle #3, be careful, because I'll probably say, "Pfff, principle #3—I know all about that. I've understood principle #3 since I was in Sunday School. You don't have to tell me about that."

But then you say, "But Darrell, have you ever thought about the connection between principle #3 and #5?" And that may be the missing piece for me.

Most of the information you need to gain victory, you probably already have in your head. But to get the progress you're looking for will require some more intent looking, more gazing, more meditating, more digesting those truths and putting them into practice so that they go from being just information gathering dust in your head to becoming a working part of your perspective on life. So it shapes the way you look at things and the way you interpret the world and events. And that's what will jumpstart spiritual growth.

So Peter comes along and says, "I'm not going to teach you anything new. I'm going to write two books covering all the truths you've already learned and force you to look more deeply at it and gaze at it until it sinks in and becomes part of your perspective and outlook on life." That's what it means to remember rather than forget.

Cleansing

So Peter warns us about forgetting—spiritual dementia. But not all spiritual dementia. He narrows it down to dementia in one specific area: dementia about your past cleansing.

2 Peter 1:9 But if anyone does not have [increasing virtues], he is nearsighted and blind, and has become forgetful of the cleansing of his past sins.

The Importance of Cleansing

"But Peter, of all the principles in the Bible, how do you know that one is the one I'm forgetting?" Peter says, "You might be forgetting other things too, but if you're not growing, I promise you, you're definitely forgetting your past cleansing."

And that's kind of alarming, because how often do you think about your past cleansing? I don't know about you, but I have to admit—I hardly ever think of it. I think a lot about God's forgiveness, and that's important. But cleansing and forgiveness are two different things.

Forgiveness is about the restoration of a broken relationship. Cleansing is part of what makes that possible, but it's more specific than forgiveness. And we need to know exactly what it is because it's a huge deal in Scripture. The OT has whole chapters devoted to describing cleanness and uncleanness. The whole kosher food system was all about clean and unclean foods. Only clean

animals could be offered to God in worship, never unclean. And the reason sacrifices were needed were for when God's people became unclean and needed to be cleansed. Those were all physical illustrations to teach us about what it means to be spiritually clean or dirty.

Isaiah 1:16 Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.

Dirtiness is a metaphor for moral evil. Jeremiah 4:14 Wash your heart from evil.
And that's not just an OT concept.

Titus 3:5 ... He saved us through the washing of rebirth

1 Corinthians 6:9... The wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God ... 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed.

Acts 22:16 ... Be baptized, and wash away your sins.

Ephesians 5:26 says Jesus cleansed the Church by the washing of water with the word. And the saints in Revelation 7:14 who come out of the great tribulation "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." So from cover to cover in the Bible this is a very big theme.

Sin Makes You Unclean in God's Sight

It's a big theme, but what does it mean? What does it mean to be spiritually dirty, what does it mean to be washed, and what does it mean to be clean? When David cried out, "Cleanse me from my sin. Wash me and I'll be whiter than snow," what was it, exactly, that he wanted to happen?

Being Repulsive to God

The Bible uses various metaphors to describe sin. It's like falling short, missing the mark, it's like unfaithfulness in a relationship, betrayal, rebellion. Each one of those is designed to teach us something about sin. So what is the filthiness metaphor designed to teach us? Why describe sin that way?

When it comes to your physical body, why do you take showers? Isn't it mainly to avoid being repulsive to people? You don't want to smell bad, you don't want to look bad. And even if there's no hint of an odor problem, you might take a shower anyway just in case. The purpose of cleaning yourself is mainly so you won't be disgusting or repulsive to people.

The reason the Bible uses the analogy of filthiness to describe what sin does to us is to teach us that what BO is to us, that's what sin is to God. If you want to know how God feels when we sin, just think of how you feel when you see or smell something really disgusting. I won't gross you out by giving specific examples. Just think of whatever turns your stomach or makes you nauseous—that's the same feeling God has when we sin.

Let that sink in for a second—to have God be disgusted with you. 100% of your wellbeing in life depends on having a good relationship with God. Everything in life rides on having a love relationship with God and being close to him. So what could be worse than being the object of his disgust? I think that's even worse than being the object of his anger.

Of all the consequences of sin, the more you love God, the more *that* consequence will be the most painful of them all. It's agonizing to know that someone you love and respect is disgusted and repulsed by you. That's why, when David finally woke up to his sin, he was so desperate for cleansing.

Psalms 51:2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ... 9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. 10 Create in me a pure heart, O God.

Of all the terrible consequences of sin, the one that stung the most was being filthy in God's sight. He couldn't stand the thought of God being grossed out by him. And he *loved* the thought of God being delighted in him.

When I say, "Let that sink in," some of you might think, "It's not hard to let that sink in. That sunk in a long time ago. That's kind of how I think of God's attitude toward me most of the time." So it's easy for you to think of God that way.

Okay, so then let this sink in:

Psalm 51:7 Cleanse me ... and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

Let that sink in. Digest that law of gravity. It's the opposite of being filthy in God's sight. So instead of recoiling in disgust, he looks at you and is attracted to you. Have you ever caught a scent of someone who had some perfume or cologne that just smelled really good? Imagine God inhaling really big and getting a giant smile and saying, "I want to get closer."

I think a lot of Christians, if they had written Psalm 51, would say, "Wash me, and I'll be tolerable in your sight." They think when they try to draw near to God he just holds his nose and says, "Okay, I'll listen to your prayer." That's wrong. He doesn't hold his nose. He takes a big, deep breath and loves it and wants more.

That's what "clean" means. And the process of washing or cleansing means going from the first one to the second one. Going from God recoiling in disgust to being delighted with pleasure. That's what it means to be cleansed.

How God Does It

God chooses to turn his attention away from your sin and to turn his attention to your close relationship with his Son. When he thinks about you being close to his Son, that fills his heart with warmth and favor toward you. God can do that. He has full control over his own attention, and if he turns his eyes away from your sin, it's completely out of his view and no longer has any impact on how he feels about you.

Past Sins

And you might ask, "Why does Peter specify *past* sins?" He specifies past sins because those are the only sins you've been cleansed from. It's very common for preachers to say, "God forgave all your sins, past, present, *and future!*" That's one of those things even seminary-trained pastors believe is in the Bible just because people they trust have said it so many times. But the Bible never says your sins are forgiven past, present, and future.

You haven't been cleansed from your future sins because your future sins haven't made you dirty yet. You haven't been forgiven for your future sins because you haven't committed them, so there's nothing to forgive.

When people say God has forgiven your sins past, present, and future, they may not have thought through the assumptions behind that. For God to forgive you for something, you would have to be guilty of that thing. So they're assuming God holds you responsible for your future sins.

"Maybe God does hold people responsible for future sins? Doesn't he have foreknowledge and know all their future sins?" Yes, he does know them, but no, he doesn't hold you responsible for them. That's hard for us to grasp because if you and I had foreknowledge, and we could see someone was going to hurt us in the future, we would probably hold it against them right now. Maybe that's why God didn't give us foreknowledge.

Don't ever form your ideas about God from what you would do. Always form your conception of God from what the Bible says. And what does it say? Do you remember what God said to Cain before Cain murdered his brother?

Genesis 4:7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Did God know at that point that Cain was going to murder his brother? Of course he did. But Cain wasn't guilty of that sin until he actually made the decision in real time to do it.

God always deals with you where you are, which is in the present. The attitude God wants you to have toward your future sins is not that they are inevitable but forgiven. He wants you to think of your future sins as things that don't have to happen. That's why he told Cain, "Sin is crouching at the door. It desires to control you, but you must master it." Even though God knew it would happen, right up to the moment it did happen, God spoke as if not committing it was still a possibility.

So Peter specifies cleansing of your past sins because forgiveness and cleansing happen after you get dirty, not before. If you question that, the next time you take a shower, try scrubbing until you've cleansed yourself from all future dirt and sweat that you'll ever have on you. That's nonsense.

So what about new sins you commit as a Christian?

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

He *will* purify us, future tense, after we confess. "Wait a minute. Does that mean you get cleansed in a big way once when you become a Christian, and then you have to keep getting cleansed in small ways over and over as you keep sinning in your Christian walk?" Yes! And that's something Peter can teach us because he learned it directly from Jesus in the upper room.

John 13:8 ... Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean."

Jesus cleansed your past sins with a full bath when you became a Christian. But after that, as you walk through the muck of this world and stumble into sin, you don't need another full bath, but you do need cleansing (just like David). Each time you step in it, so to speak, you need cleansing again. And once you get cleansed, then it's in the category of past cleansing and Peter says, "Don't ever forget it."

How Forgetting Cleansing Hinders Growth

Okay, so forgetting your cleansing stymies your spiritual growth, but how? I'll suggest three: Reasons, Ravages, and Reality. First, "Reasons."

Forgetting the Reasons for Your Cleansing

1) Forgetting Your Reasons for Wanting Cleansing

You received cleansing from God because you asked for it—why did you ask for it? You wanted cleansing for the same reason David did—because you couldn't stand the thought of being morally repulsive. Like the Prodigal son in the pigsty saying, "I can't go on like this." And every time we wander from God in our Christian walk we replay little miniature versions of that Prodigal story. Maybe you're like me and you don't remember your conversion, but all of us know what it's

like to come to a point where you just feel like garbage. “What’s *wrong* with me? Why can’t I change?” You feel like David in Psalm 51 where over and over he begged God,

Psalm 51:2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God.

It can’t just be basic reform—I need nothing less than a full-blown act of divine creation. God, what you did in Genesis 1:1—I need you to do that again inside me this time.

That’s what Peter is saying you’ve forgotten. Whenever it was in your life you were most earnest in begging God’s forgiveness and cleansing —remembering that feeling is essential for making continued spiritual progress.

And that’s where your baptism is helpful. Unlike other religions, Christianity only has two prescribed ceremonies: communion and baptism. And what is baptism? A picture of washing. Communion is to remind us of what Christ did to cleanse us. Baptism reminds you of your decision to receive that cleansing.

When you’re tempted with sin, you can think back to your baptism and say, “There was a time in my life, probably the time I was thinking most clearly, when I really, really wanted to be clean.” When you’re not growing spiritually, of all the truths you might have forgotten, Peter knows one of them is your past cleansing because if you’re no longer driving on the highway of holy living, obviously you’ve forgotten why you got on that highway to begin with.

2) Forgetting God’s Reason for Cleansing You

So remember your reasons for wanting to be clean, and even more important, remember God’s reasons for wanting you clean. Why did God cleanse you? Obviously, because he wanted you clean, right? Isn’t that the reason anyone cleans anything?

God washed you, at massive cost to himself, because he really, really wanted you to be morally clean. He wanted you to be holy, righteous, pure, self-controlled, steadfast, godly, loving. If you’re not growing in all that, you must have forgotten how strong God’s desire is for you to be clean. It’s the whole reason Jesus went through what he went through.

Titus 2:14 [Jesus Christ] gave himself for us ... to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Jesus didn’t suffer and die to purify us just to do us a favor. He did it because he *really* wanted a pure people. He wanted it so much that it was worth all that suffering to make it happen. How many temptations would we be able to easily resist if we could just remember how strong God’s desire is for us to be clean?

Forgetting the Ravages of Your Cleansing

So if you want to grow, think deeply about the reasons for your cleansing—your reasons and God’s reasons. Secondly, remember the ravages of your cleansing. Remember all the pain that was involved.

It wasn’t just a matter of saying, “Hey God, cleansing please.” And he says, “Oh, okay, you’re clean” and you walk away. If you think that’s all it was, you’ve never been in a broken relationship—especially if what broke it was adultery. And that’s the word the Bible uses to describe our sin—adultery against God (James 4:4).

Can a relationship broken by adultery be restored? Yes. Can it be done without a lot of rough moments? No. Remorse is an excruciating emotion. Think of Peter, who went out and wept bitterly.

The Pain of the Cleansing Process

And not only is the remorse painful, so is the cleansing process. When you let your heart attach itself to a sin, it's painful to break away from something your heart has fallen in love with.

In the C.S. Lewis book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, a boy has been turned into a dragon by his sin. So he comes to Aslan, who represents Jesus, for help.

Then the lion said ... 'You will have to let me undress you.' I was afraid of his claws ... but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. He peeled the beastly stuff right off—just as I thought I'd done it myself the other three times, only they hadn't hurt—and there it was lying on the grass ... And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me—I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on—and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again."² Jesus will reverse the damage we do to ourselves with sin, but it's not a pleasant process. So every time you remind yourself of what you went through, you're asking yourself, "Do you want to go through that again?"

When you say, "I'll just commit this sin and then ask forgiveness afterward," you're forgetting all the pain that's involved. Would you say, "I'll just take a sledgehammer and smash my hand because I know it can heal"? It's true the bone can heal, but that's not a good reason to do the damage in the first place. Especially when you realize nothing good came from the sin.

Romans 6:21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?

All that did was put you on a path of shame and guilt and death. When you stop growing and start coasting in your spiritual life, it's because you've forgotten all that.

Forgetting the Reality of Your Cleansing

So how does remembering your past cleansing help your spiritual growth? You remember the *reasons* (your reasons and God's reasons). You remember the *ravages* of the process (the shame, the remorse, and the painful ordeal of ripping away those sins your heart has fallen in love with). Now a third: If you're not growing, you've forgotten the *reality* of your cleansing. You've forgotten that it's real. The fact that you really, truly are clean before God is a fact that hasn't sunk in.

This might be the area of the most common spiritual dementia there is—inability to grasp the concept that you are clean in God's sight. He walks past you, inhales, smiles, and says, "Ah, that's beautiful!"

Why do you think the Accuser of the brethren has that title? Why is Satan so intent on accusing us and trying to make us feel condemned by God? Why does he want you to think God is perpetually disappointed in you or grieved by you?

² From ch.7.

Discouragement

Getting you to forget that God has cleansed you is strategic for Satan because if you feel dirty in God's sight, you'll get discouraged and stop running hard after righteousness because it feels impossible. And in the moment of temptation, you'll think, "I'm already unclean before God, what difference will it make to become a little more unclean?" Kind of like if your house or your garage or whatever is a huge mess, you don't think anything of leaving one more thing lying out. But if you spent a whole day cleaning it and now it's immaculate, you're much more motivated to keep it that way.

If you feel like things are great between you and God, you really won't want to do anything to risk messing that up. But your relationship with him seems like it's in shambles, you're not as careful about guarding things that are already a mess. So if you don't feel clean before God, you'll be far more vulnerable to temptation, discouragement, despair, bad attitudes—all of it.

Your Attitude toward God

And the worst of it will come in your attitude toward God. If you forget that you're clean, instead of feeling gratitude toward God, you'll start to feel resentment. Anytime you feel like someone has a negative attitude toward you, you'll start to feel the same way toward him. So over time, little seeds of resentment toward God can plant themselves in your heart without you even realizing it. It's incredibly damaging and dangerous to go for an extended period of time feeling rejected or unloved by God.

Conclusion

So back to the question: do you have a bad memory? If so, how do you improve it? Let me offer two quick suggestions. First, if memory depends on making connections with other truths, what if you made a habit of looking for those connections when you're in church? When you sing a worship song or listen to the sermon ask, "What is the connection between my past cleansing and what the pastor is saying right now about Moses and the burning bush?" Or spiritual gifts, or whatever the song is about. Make as many connections as you can so your whole belief system becomes spiderwebbed around the truth of your cleansing.

Second, take a hint from the fact that God used feasts and celebrations as his main way of helping his people remember things. Probably the strongest driver of memory is emotion. Isn't it true that most of your strongest memories from the past came from events that touched your emotions in a strong way? Something that really hurt you, made you really sad or angry or really happy—those are the events that lodge themselves in your memory. So what if you do things to celebrate your cleanness before God?

You confess something to God, you realize you've been cleansed—go out to Dairy Queen and celebrate with a turtle pecan blizzard. You have a steak in the freezer—save it for the next time you have communion at church. Spend the whole time you're taking communion thinking about the reasons, ravages, and reality of your cleansing, then after church, come home and grill that ribeye to celebrate.

Whatever it takes, find a way to remember your past cleansing. Because it's your memory of the past that gives hope for the future. In the words of Alexander Maclaren: "Memory supplies the colors with which hope paints her most wonderful pictures."