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SETTING STONES IN PLACE

The glass in the windows rattled as her daughter stormed from the house, slamming the front door. Anne wondered which would break first: her heart or her daughter's rebellion. In a face-off with God, Anne stretched out on the floor of her bedroom, facing the ceiling. After the racking sobs subsided, she began to think back two, three years.

Her first child too wreaked havoc on their lives and himself as he struggled to find his own way. Eventually, with a mighty shove of the Holy Spirit, her son had squeezed through his self-made torture chamber and into the freedom of life in Christ.

Remembering her son, remembering God's faithfulness in that situation, Anne began to believe that God would be faithful with her daughter. She could hold on and trust Him. He had proven Himself over and over.

Remembering

Through her pain, Anne discovered an age-old truth about God, and about the faith process. In the midst of distress and difficulty, God is faithful, because He cannot be anything less. The process of remembering those very acts by a faithful God brought Anne into a place of renewed hope. And faith.

How often do the circumstances of our lives threaten to cut our hearts in half? And how often have we found that the Lord is faithful to see us through, if we will only hold on and continue to call on God's reputation?

In Scripture, the Lord tells us repeatedly, "Remember." Perhaps my favorite place in the Bible that talks about remembering is Joshua 3 and 4. After four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, and then forty years of desert wandering, the Israelites stood at the cusp of the Promised Land, on the edge of their future. They had been waiting for this moment since Abraham's time. Only a teeny issue separated them from walking into the homeland God had promised for many years: a river.

But not just any river. This was the River Jordan, and the Israelites stared as turbulent waters raged past them. Waters at flood stage overflowed the banks of the river, eating away at the shoreline, running in rivulets toward them.

Joshua halted their fear and called on the faith of the children of Israel. He said, "And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap" (3:13).

The priests stepped out, and it was so. The waters peeled back and rose up in a pile upstream, and nearly two million people, their livestock, and caravans crossed over the river on dry ground. Not muddy, soggy ground, but dry ground. From floods and mud to dry dirt and millions of footsteps walking into freedom. God does not take halfway measures—not then, not now.

After the crossing, the Lord said to Joshua, "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe, and com-

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mand them, saying, ‘Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight’” (4:2–3).

*The stones set in place a rock-hard
faith from rock-hard places.*

Each of the chosen priests hefted a huge stone and hauled it from the riverbed to the new camp in the new land. These stones would serve as a marker, a signpost among the people, so that “when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever” (4:6–7).

Remembering God’s might and faithfulness would see Israel through rough waters and tough crossings. Remembering becomes a tool that sees us through present pain and difficulties and propels us into new, faith-filled spaces, preparing us for the future.

Rock-Hard Faith

The stones from the Israelites’ journey across the Jordan River served as a faith trigger for them, and for the generations that followed. The stones reminded them of God’s power yesterday, last week, last year. Every time they saw the stones, they remembered God’s faithfulness, God’s strength, God’s mighty love and strong hand of deliverance. The stones set in place a rock-hard faith from rock-hard places. The memorial reminded them, over and over, that their faithful God could and would deliver again and again.

We all have our Jordan Rivers, where the waters roil and our

faith quakes and we are barricaded from passing through into victory. Peg and Bob's river extended to their whole family. Each time one of their daughters called and announced a new life stirring within her, they rejoiced and could scarcely wait to share the news with everyone they knew. When their youngest daughter, the last of their childless children, called to announce she was finally pregnant, they threw caution and good sense to the wind. They rushed out even before the blue pregnancy-test strip was dry to purchase chenille blankets, fleecy pajamas, and cuddly toys.

But in a matter of weeks, their joy turned to caution when their daughter called to say that she'd experienced spotting. The doctor suggested an early ultrasound. Then a blood test. He assured them, however, that all seemed fine. "Sometimes this just happens," the doctor said. Eager to believe, the entire family carefully counted the weeks for her first trimester to be completed—a time after which they would surely be into the safety zone.

But, two weeks before arriving at this milestone, an early morning call shattered the quiet and their hopes. Their daughter sobbed into the phone. "Mom, I've been at the hospital all night. We lost the baby."

A close family, the entire clan converged on the daughter's home to mingle their tears, exchange hugs, and talk out their sorrow. Something beautiful was gone forever. No well-meaning words by friends, who assured them that more children would come, could erase the pain of the loss of this child who was promised and so lovingly expected.

During that trying time, Peg's daughter and her husband experienced not only a barrenness of the womb, but also a barrenness of spirit. Their hope and joy faded, and months passed before they could begin to dream that maybe, just maybe, God would bless them with another child. Barrenness of spirit became a daunting floodplain in the lives of several family members.

These moments when the well of your soul is empty—these are the times when you need to remember God's power and the times in the past when He has sustained you.

A Flooding Fear

Early in our marriage, Tony traveled frequently, which meant I was home with young children. Fear riddled me in the night. I worried constantly about Tony's safety. Frequently I slept with the lights on. Finally I decided to turn my devotional life into a study of deliverance from my fear, using Psalm 34 steadily until I learned to trust the Lord completely in this area. I began to arm myself with Scriptures, memorizing and quoting repeatedly, "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. . . . The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Psalm 34:4, 7).

When my (Jane) children were young, I prayed Scripture over them at bedtime to combat nighttime fears. Whether they were awakening with bad dreams or afraid to go to sleep, I would wrap them in my arms and recite God's words over them. As the children got older and were more resistant to such overt touch and faith, I simply laid my hand on them and claimed the words and the truth silently. Sometimes while they slept, I stood by their beds and covered them in Scripture prayers. Favorites include Philippians 2:9–11; 4:6–8; Romans 8:31–39; 2 Timothy 1:7. Even now, we both still pray Scriptures over those we love. Sometimes we pray silently, sometimes when gently patting or touching, always trying to communicate peace and Christ's presence in places of anxiety or fear.

Perhaps your flood stage comes through financial duress. Possibly it is a broken or breaking marriage, an unfaithful spouse, a prodigal child, parenting your grandchildren. Or maybe you have never married and still scan the horizon for the man of your dreams, and meanwhile battle a broken heart over your singleness. Perhaps your current crisis involves job loss, or underemployment, or discrimination, or problems with your health, or infertility.

Fear is natural in the floodplains of our lives.

But fear is no match for God. He creates goodness out of grotesque situations, and in the midst of our Jordan River, we remember where the Lord has delivered us in the past. These memories are souvenir stones of God's faithfulness. God can part the waters, God can dry the riverbed, God can make a way for us. He has done it before.

He can do it again. These are the instances we call to mind. These moments reinstall our faith and reboot our hope and empower us to set foot into the water.

*Remembering as an act of faith
negates the fear that holds us hostage.*

Imagine, as the Hebrew people gawked and shuffled about at the banks of the Jordan, what stories began to whisper through their minds and then back and forth to one another. Stories of plagues, of frogs and bloody water and locusts and the death fog; stories of Egyptians hard on their heels as they escaped to the desert, of a cloud by day and a fire by night; stories of another body of water, the Red Sea, and the miraculous splitting of those waters; stories of another crossing on dry ground. Stories of a faithful God, the one true God, the God who had delivered them in the past. These stories called forth faith in the followers of Yahweh, faith that allowed them to step forward into the future promised long ago.

The Stories in the Stones

Are you facing a river too full and wild to cross? God wants to tether us to His side during the turbulent times in our lives. He longs to build into us qualities of endurance. In the midst of circumstances that we might not choose, our Lord may not deliver us from the situation. But He can certainly set us free in the midst of the problems and pain.

In our journey together through *Stones of Remembrance*, we will explore various women in Scripture who were used by God to accomplish His good purposes. Through their struggles and their faith, we will remember the God who makes a way for us in the teeming rivers of our lives.

This will be an archaeological dig of sorts. We will excavate the

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lives of women in the Scriptures, and excavate our own lives as well. As we unearth our stones, gently brushing off the stories from our past that display God's faithfulness, we will be encouraged and our faith will grow. These stones of remembrance lay a foundation on which God longs to build us into mighty women, just as Peter says: "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5).

The Purposes of God's Memory Stones

Challenges and issues in the past and present can hold us hostage. Are there situations in your life that you will not let go—you bring them up time and time again? They become an excuse to camp on the wrong side of the river. As one pastor's wife wrote, "My childhood has hung around much too long and now I am getting free."

Don't be like the elephants at the circus. They are trained to stand still and be in bondage. A baby elephant is chained to a peg in the dirt with a cuff around its ankle. The chain takes away willpower, so by adulthood an elephant has no idea that its strength far surpasses the strength of the feeble peg in the ground. So these mighty beasts—whose grandparents likely once thundered through plains in a land of freedom, far, far away—stand docilely attached to a flimsy chain.

We too have been trained by our old master, Satan, but at the cross we were set free. Jesus tells us, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Thanks be to God, who wants to break those chains so that we can walk in freedom into the Promised Land.

God's purposes in stones of remembrance become even more apparent as our lives and stones and stories impact the lives of those around us. It was true in Joshua's River Jordan dilemma, and it is true for our dilemmas now. "The Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever" (Joshua 4:23–24).

STONES OF REMEMBRANCE

The rocks of remembering call to mind the hardships of our journey and the Lord's deliverance. To all who come near our lives, they serve as a testimony of God's goodness and power. For Joshua and his desert conquerors, the Lord answered this prayer immediately:

So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel (Joshua 5:1).

When the Israelites summoned their courage by remembering God's power and then surging forward, the stories of their deliverance spread. Their enemies dissolved before them, and the Hebrew children conquered the land the Lord had pledged to them since Abraham's time.

We need stones of remembrance because of the challenges awaiting us in the future. The Enemy plans to fight against us—but “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). We too can conquer the land the Lord gives us. We can and will see the mighty hand of the Lord displaying His power and purpose to those around us as we remember and move forward. But this requires preparation on our part: we need to expect God to show up and be ready for the miracle.

*P*reparing Our Hearts

Just as bodybuilders pump iron to get ready for their next strength event, we get ready for God to act by pumping up on Scripture. God primed Joshua for success with these words: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

A friend who served in the army said, “We were given a black

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book. It contained all the specifics and directions. We were to carry the book with us at all times, so that if we had questions and no one was available to answer them, we could look in the book. We slept with the book by our side, and if we were caught without the black book, we dropped to the floor for push-ups.”

Our black book is the Bible. Carry the Word of God in your heart and in your hand. Don't be caught without it. Like the priests who stepped into the water, carrying the ark of the covenant in front of them. The results will change the trajectory of your life, and transform both you and those you intercept. Charles Spurgeon said:

Never, never neglect the word of God; that will make thy heart rich with precept, rich with understanding; and then thy conversation, when it flows from thy mouth, will be like thine heart, rich, unctuous and savory. Make thy heart full of rich, generous love, and then the stream that flows from thy hand will be just as rich and generous as thine heart. Oh! go, Christian, to the great mine of riches, and cry unto the Holy Spirit to make thy heart rich unto salvation. So shall thy life and conversation be a boon to thy fellows; and when they see thee, thy face shall be as the angel of God.¹

Our success doesn't hinge on what the culture at-large says or does, or how others act toward us, or even on the outcome of our circumstances. Our ultimate success totally depends on God: God's Son the living Word, and God's written Word in us, filling us, directing us. And then, when we come to our River Jordan, the Word swells up within us and we remember, and find hope, and are able to move forward into success. Success on God's terms.

Real success requires a habit of moving into the secret place with God (Psalm 91). Along with our black book, meditating on the Word day and night, we also prepare for God to act by purifying our hearts. Joshua gathered the Hebrew people and said, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (Joshua 3:5). Joshua expected God to do amazing feats because he had filled his mind with God's presence and His Word—and then he prepared himself and his soldiers. They were expected to be free of sin so that their holy God could appear among them and lead them out into battle.

So often we have three strikes against us before we even step out: we don't expect God to do wonders among us, we don't fill and feast our hearts on the Scriptures, and we run about the camp with impure hearts. We get in the way of God's work. The psalmist said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23–24).

When we get ready for God to act, we can be certain He will do it. Just remember: He has done it before. He can do it again and again and again.

**WHAT TO DO WHEN
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO**

Wait silently (Psalm 62:5).

Pour out your heart (Psalm 62:8).

Trust in Him at all times (Proverbs 3:5–8).

Cling to the rock (Psalm 18:46).

Crossing Over Our Jordan Rivers

We don't know when God will get us over the river. We don't know how God will dry the riverbed and allow us to cross. But we do know, by faith, that He will act on our behalf. And while we wait, we remember.

- ❖ We remember our Red Seas, the places where God has parted the waters for us, the impossible places where God came through and the Enemy was defeated.
- ❖ We remember who brought us through.
- ❖ We remember whose we are. We belong to Christ!
- ❖ We remember that God's delays are not delays of inactivity, but of preparation. He delays, but He does not

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deny. While we wait He prepares us for His answer according to His perfect, preordained plan.

- ❖ We remember and link up with like-minded, stronger people who are going in the same direction. We can't afford to attempt the waters of the Jordan alone.
- ❖ We remember to tell our children, and our children's children, that they may see the mighty hand of God and take courage for the rivers they will have to cross. They piggyback on our faith when we share the stories of God's mighty acts in our lives.
- ❖ We remember to offer encouragement for our friends (Hebrews 10:24–25; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

Moving On

Remembering is good. But we can't just reminisce about God's goodness. The children of Israel could have just talked about the Red Sea wonders while standing at the Jordan River, and it would not have made any difference. Talk is cheap. They had to move into the new challenge, pulling on the strength of the past—pulling on God's strength. And His strength is perfect. His power is perfected in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Ultimately, our remembering fuels our faith and we forge ahead. It's too easy to sit around, remembering, all the while increasing our inertia. At some point, we proclaim with Joshua, "Advance!" (6:7, NIV) and get a move on.

Because faith that does not act is a faith that is just an act.

Travel Mercies

1. Take note of where you are *right now*. Spiritually, emotionally, physically, relationally. Where is your faith being tested? Where is your River Jordan?
2. God set up stones on the bank of the Jordan both for the Israelites' obedience, and so the surrounding nations might know the power of God. Where is obedience required for you at this stage of your journey? Who around you is watching your life to see how God acts? Or to see if your faith is just an act?
3. When standing at the Jordan River, (1) we expect God to act, (2) we feast on God's Word, and (3) we purify our hearts before Him. When have you experienced God's hand in your life as a result of these kinds of preparations? Which of the three is hardest for you? Why?
4. What are your Red Seas? When has God displayed His power in your life in the *past*? What happens in your heart as you look back and remember, then look forward to your current fears and faith-tests?
5. How hard is it to share your Jordan River experiences with others? Who are the like-minded people with whom you contemplate these things? If you have not linked up with these companions, why not? How will you do that?

What Mean These Stones?

Choose some stones to stack: What would your stones of remembrance be, if you were to examine them today? What do you think your current trials mean for you spiritually? Invite God to bring hope into your heart for the burden you bear.

Power Up

“Don’t for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you’ll get where you’re going; then you’ll succeed. Haven’t I commanded you? Strength! Courage! Don’t be timid; don’t get discouraged. God, your God, is with you every step you take.”

—*Joshua 1:8–9 THE MESSAGE*

Rock-Hard Truth

“The king’s efforts to destroy the strength of Israel—so clearly a work of God—met with failure again and again. And that failure was usually from the efforts of women, whom Pharaoh did not consider a threat.”

—NET, note 60, Exodus 1:22

Remember Me, O Lord

*Heavenly Father,
As I stand at the edge of my River Jordan,
I remember by faith the places
where You have dried up the Red Seas in my past.
I remember Your love and faithfulness
and I choose, now, to stack those stones of faith.
You will go before me. You have done it before.
I give You this day, the mud and floods in front of me,
and wait while You dry up the riverbed.
Amen.*