

*Preaching As Reminding: Book Review*  
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*Preaching as Reminding*, Jeffrey D. Arthurs, Downers Grove, Illinois; IVP Academic, c. 2017, 166 pp. indexed, ISBN: 978-0-8308-5190-4, \$16.20.

Jeffrey D. Arthurs is professor of preaching and communications at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is past president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Arthurs presents a thorough investigation into preaching as reminding giving yet another perspective to preachers regarding their work.

The book is comprised of seven chapters preceded by a Foreword by John Ortberg, Acknowledgements by the author and an Introduction. It ends with a stated Conclusion, Appendix: "We Remember Jesus Christ" a hymn; Bibliography, Name and Subject Index and Scripture Index.

The first three chapters of the book cover the theoretical aspects of preaching as reminding and the last four chapters cover the practical aspects involving style (vivid language), story, delivery and ceremony and symbol in stirring memory.

In the Introduction, the author states that every sermon does not have to be novel. The preacher's role is that of reminding his audience of the great things that God has done. He warns that reminding is not nagging and that no one's desires to be nagged. He concludes his thoughts by stating what reminding does: it prompts thankfulness, raises hope, prompts repentance, fosters humility; helps believers walk wisely, warns of unbelief and disobedience, encourages belief and obedience, prompts mercy and forms individual and communal identity.

In chapter one, Arthurs shows that God remembers (and forgets). "In the Bible, "remembering" is more than mental recall. It involves emotion and volition as well as cognition" (13). Memory involves participation and blessing. It also connects us to the past with the purpose of influencing our present and future. Memory is a whole-person activity or in the words of Brevard Childs, biblical memory is *actualization*. The Hebrew word for remember is *zakar* and the Greek word is *mimnesko*. Both of these words indicate that memory is a whole-person activity not just recall. It involves the mind, emotions and will. God remembers His promises, our weaknesses, to bless, to punish, and to discipline. While God remembers everyone, He especially remembers His people. And, His people ask Him to remember them. God also forgets. The failure to be remembered by God has dire consequences. God forgets sin when it is properly treated through repentance and redemption.

In chapter two, the focus shifts away from God to man. Humans forget (and remember). Arthurs cites several examples of characters who do not utilize the full range of memory. King David forgets the LORD lifted him from his low estate to being king (2 Sam. 12:7-9). The nation of Israel forgets that God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt (Ps. 106:21). Forgetting God causes the people to worship idols (Judges 8:34). Jesus told a parable about the unmerciful servant who had been forgiven an enormous debt but would not forgive a small debt because of his failure to remember (Mt. 18:23-35). Jesus' disciples forgot the miracle of the feeding of five thousand (Mt. 16:9-12). Both forgetting God and forgetting truth have dire consequences. Arthurs provides some useful information from neuroscience on the human

memory from pages 30-35. The focus is on how the memory is formed and utilized. Arthurs gives some comments on why this information is important for preaching. After indicating that the reticular activating system (RAS) filters more than 99 percent of the sensory data it receives, he asks what does it allow? “Novelty, movement, and surprise can garner short-term attention, but preachers want something deeper—engagement—and that occurs only through relevance” (33). “We find it nearly impossible to give attention for an extended period of time to anything that seems irrelevant” (33).

Arthurs shows how electronic media are changing our brains so that we are comfortable only with brevity and addicted to distraction (36). Then, he states, “Electronic media are making us adept at skimming and inept at exegeting” (36). Modern media shape the way we read and at the same time, our perception and attention. We are easily distracted and constantly searching for new stimuli. Vast storage capabilities and instantaneous transmission lead to information overload or as Edna St. Vincent Millay called it, “a meteoric shower of facts” (38). It becomes impossible to determine what should be retained and what should be discarded (39). Arthurs affirms that electronic media challenges memory.

Another form of distraction that affects memory is idolatry. When we forget God, we supplant God with some other god. While anything can become a god in our lives, Arthurs mentions science, mammon, worldly lusts, etc. One way to keep ourselves from idols is deliberate acts of memory. Preachers utilize the story of redemption and all of its elements to aid the memory and prevent forgetting God.

Arthurs also addresses proper forgetting. He illustrates the blessing in forgetting by referencing the 55 individuals in the U.S. who have been diagnosed with hyperthymesia (highly superior autobiographical memory (HSAM)). These people have an extraordinary ability to recall specific details of events in their past. However, these memories haunt them rather than bless them. Arthurs shows that forgetting is a blessing, but it is also intentional. Disciples of Jesus must manifest the spiritual discipline of no longer focusing on the past. Forgiven sins must be put in the past. Christians are defined by God’s grace. Arthurs urges proper forgetting of the world, forgiven sins, and accomplishments.

Chapter three focuses on the Lord’s Remembrancers. “The phrase, “the Lord’s remembrancers” was coined in 1594 by Lancelot Andrewes, chaplain to Queen Elizabeth and King James I, in a sermon titled, “Remember Lot’s Wife.” Andrewes drew his metaphor from the royal court. The king’s (queen’s) remembrancer is the oldest judicial position in continual existence in Great Britain, having been created in 1154 by Henry II. Today, it is a ceremonial role, but for centuries the remembrancer’s job was to put the lord treasurer and the barons of court in remembrance of pending business, taxes paid, and unpaid, and other things that pertained to the benefit of the crown” (3). Andrewes said that preachers are the “Lord’s remembrancers.” Arthurs affirms that stirring memory is one of the minister’s primary tasks. God’s word has performative power. “The Word is a lamp that illumines, a fire that consumes, a hammer that breaks stony hearts, a sword that pierces, water that cleanses, a seed that bears fruit, a mirror that reveals, and milk that nourishes” (49). Through preaching, the past is brought into the present and action results. Arthurs surveys the Old Testament and New Testament to illustrate the power of memory in preaching. He explores Deuteronomy, the prophets, the Epistles, with emphasis on the book of Hebrews. Arthurs shows how the general structure of the Epistles demonstrates how the apostles conducted themselves as

remembrancers. The structure is the indicative followed by the imperative. “When the Epistles command, rebuke, and exhort (the imperative) they do so on the basis of the character and work of God (the indicative). Jesus laid down his life for us (indicative), so we should lay down our lives for each other (imperative (I Jn. 3:16-17). Because Jesus will bring departed saints with him when he comes again, we should not grieve like those who have no hope (I Thess. 4:13-18). Because Jesus became poor for us, we should give generously (2 Cor. 8:8-12). In the Epistles, action is motivated by theology that has been brought to a burning focus in the minds of the recipients” (56). The apostles stir memory of deliverance so the recipients will live in congruence with that deliverance. The proof of memory is fidelity (56).

Arthurs shows that neuroscience confirms the inseparability of thinking and feeling. Preaching not only engages the mind, it engages the heart. Reminding has just as much to do with emotion as with cognition. The author is careful to emphasize that logos (Word) and pathos (emotion) are companions. Sermons must use logos. They must not manipulate emotions. Emotions flow from the story of redemption.

The first three chapters have laid a foundation in theology for preaching as remembering. The next four chapters turn to methodology involving: language, story, delivery, and ceremony.

Chapter four focuses on style as a tool for stirring memory. “Vivid language rouses slumbering knowledge, values, and feelings, so that people are re-membered to the great truths of the faith” (66). The use of language is called style. “Style cannot be separated from content because language is the boxcar that carries the freight of meaning” (66). Arthurs warns, “language can be used as a spectacle, causing folks to marvel at its artistry, or it can be a pair of spectacles by which we see something else more clearly” (quoting C. S. Lewis) (69). From page 70 to 84, Arthurs presents a “how to” section on style including: concrete language verses abstract language, the use of metaphor, the use of repetition and rhythm, the use of repetition and rhythm to stir emotion (exemplified by music). The concrete examples dispersed among the material presented are very insightful.

In chapter five, the author examines story as a tool for stirring memory. Arthurs lists four characteristics of story that help explain its power: (1) imagination and emotion; (2) clarification and articulation; (3) identification and community; and (4) indirection. Then, he takes up the techniques involved in story telling: (1) retell Bible stories; (2) use dramatization; (3) use testimony; and (4) use stories from history. Each of these techniques is illustrated by Arthurs with concrete examples.

Chapter six addresses delivery as a tool for stirring memory. Delivery is the non-verbal component of oral communication (104). Arthurs gives the following reasons as to why delivery is neglected in sermon presentation: (1) some think it is unimportant; (2) for some preachers it smacks of playacting; (3) it is difficult to change after years of being oneself; and (4) some speakers have a skewed view of themselves. However, humans read non-verbal communication and that makes delivery important. Several important observations are made by the author: (1) When the nonverbal message conflicts with the verbal, listeners trust the nonverbal; (2) The nonverbal channel is the primary conveyer of relationship and emotion; (3) Nonverbal behavior generates emotion in the sender; and (4) The speaker’s delivery prompts a reciprocal response in the listener. Arthurs makes an important statement with regard to this final observation, “...ministers are interested in mirror neurons because they seek to stir latent

memories through the “law of instinctive sympathy, the preacher’s “right arm in the work of persuasion.” (114). Persuasion is most effective when cognition and emotion are utilized. “We do not want our sermons to be, as Ralph Waldo Emerson described his own lectures, “fine things, pretty things, wise things, but no arrows, no axes, no nectar, no growling, no transpiercing, no loving, no enchantment” (115). To stir others, the preacher must be stirred! Arthurs recommends: (1) start with yourself. In connection with this concept, Arthurs presents the idea of earnestness, i.e. an exposition of the Word marked by the conviction that comes from proven experience and sincere belief (117); (2) observe, but don’t mimic, preachers you admire; (3) watch yourself on video; (4) speak extemporaneously; (5) get your body and your voice involved (use gestures, engage the voice; convey meaning by emphasizing different words).

Arthurs completes his book in chapter seven by examining ceremony and symbol as tools for stirring memory. Ceremony and symbol use actual sensory experience to reinforce what is already known and believed. Sensory experience is the most powerful operation of the mind for riveting attention and compelling belief (127). Arthurs discusses sacred places, sacred time, rituals, other types of symbols, public reading of the Scriptures, and music. With regard to singing, he states, “singing corporately creates a synergistic experience that unites and sustains participants such as those that took part in the Civil Rights Movement” (131). Ceremony and symbol are both integrated into the worship of the New Testament. He concludes this chapter with suggestions on how to improve the worship experience and enhance memory of God and His mighty works.

The author’s Conclusion includes a prayer for the minister to be a faithful remembrancer. The Appendix contains a song, “We Remember Jesus Christ” written by the author of the book. There is an extensive Bibliography followed by a Name and Subject Index and a Scripture Index.

Arthurs book on preaching as reminding fills a void in the field of Homiletics. It dispels the notion that every sermon has to be novel. It upholds the value of repetition as an aid to memory. It warns of the danger of forgetting God, while giving permission to forget some things that need to be forgotten (past sins that have been forgiven). The book has a balance between the theological and the practical. It illustrates principles through concrete examples. It uses neuroscience to show the different aspects of human memory and how memory can be maximized. It focuses on developing a sacred memory that will bind people to God and formulate the oneness of spiritual communion in sacred community.

As always, the reader must sift through the material presented, proving all things and holding fast only to that which is good while discarding what might be objectionable.