

With the gift of memory comes the reality that sometimes we forget as well. Maybe that's a gift too. And that's like God! God does remember but he also chooses to forget and that's something that we can do too because we are made like him.

What is it that God remembers, and what is it that God chooses to forget? What might that say to us in this Remembrance Year, when we deliberately choose to remember the sadness of war which for most people is something that they would want to forget?

### **How good is your memory?**

Play memory game. I'm going to show you a series of pictures coming one after the other. I'll name them as well and then we'll have a champion from each side of the church to see how many can be remembered!

(You will need to print off a set of pictures of a random selection of objects for this game.)

How did you do?

Some of us can train our memories; we can, in the current vernacular, become brain-smart! Some of us would like to upgrade our memories as we get older in the same way you upgrade a computer's memory! Others of us need reminders, on our phones or post-it notes or knotted handkerchiefs or whatever. Memory is very useful to us... when it works.

### **What does God remember and what does God choose to forget?**

Let's go on a journey through the Bible and see some of the ways in which God remembers and what it means for us and some of the ways God forgets and what that can mean for us too.

#### **• Rainbow**

The story of Noah and the ark is in Genesis 8 and it's here that we read the wonderful words '*God remembered Noah*' (v. 1, NIV). God had told Noah to build a big boat because he was going to judge the earth using a great flood. Noah and his family were to be saved, because Noah trusted God. Noah was in a bad place, with the world washed away and just his family and the animals on the boat.

Perhaps he thought God had forgotten him. But God remembered Noah and God remembers each one of us by name and knows exactly our situation even if we think we are forgotten. The rainbow is a reminder that God will never judge the earth in that way again and that he will never forget us. God always remembers us.

#### **• A small bottle**

I wonder what might go in here. (Take ideas.) What about tears? In Psalm 56 David writes, *'you have stored my tears in your bottle and counted each of them'* (v. 8, CEV). In other words, God knows and remembers everything that's happened to us, particularly when we were in times of trouble and despair. Elsewhere you can read that God remembered Rachel (see Genesis 30:22–23) and Hannah (see 1 Samuel 1:19) when they couldn't have any children, and God answered her prayer. In the same book God remembered Abraham who was distressed that his nephew had been captured in a war, and God came to help (see Genesis 14). God remembers us in our troubles. He knows exactly what's happening to us and so we can trust that God will rescue us and come close to us when we are facing trouble.

### • **A journal**

There is another special book according to the Bible. A Book of Life where God records all that happens, so he can remember us. At the end of the Old Testament there is a lovely promise in the book of Malachi where it says, *'All those who truly respected the Lord and honoured his name started discussing these things, and when God saw what was happening, he had their names written as a reminder in his book'* (Malachi 3:16, CEV).

Everyone who trusts in God has their name written in God's book of life and that book becomes the equivalent of a guest list for heaven. If your name is written in it you will be made welcome, but if your name is not there you will not get in.

God knows and remembers all our prayers, our hopes and our longings—all the work we have tried to do faithfully for him even though it often goes wrong. God will keep his promise and will not rub us out of this Book of Life.

So God remembers us by name; God remembers us in trouble; and God remembers all that we have done and so we can trust him—his mercy, his faithfulness and his promises.

### **But what does God forget?**

• Blank paper with ink spots all over it God doesn't really ever forget. God can't forget because he knows everything that ever was, is and will be. When the word 'forget' is used in the Bible regarding God, it means God chooses not to remember. The big thing that he chooses not to remember is the mess we make of our lives. He says so both in the Old and New Testaments and it's in Jeremiah 31, where God says, 'I will forget the evil things they have done' (v. 34, CEV).

In other words, God will forget our sins, our failures, our mistakes and the mess up we make of things.

But how can God do this?

- **A cross**

It's because of this—because of the cross. It's a mystery, but because of what Jesus did on the cross by dying innocently, this can put right all the injustice of the world and in our lives and it can give us a fresh start.

- **Bread and wine**

To experience this fresh start (because God forgets our sins), we need to remember; to remember what Jesus has done. He gave a very simple way of doing that as we break bread and as a way of remembering that Jesus was broken and wants to be inside each one of us. Jesus says: '*Do this in remembrance of me*' (Luke 22:19, NIV).

So God remembers our name; remembers our troubles; remembers our hard work and faithfulness; and God chooses not to remember because of the cross all the mess we make of our lives.

But there's one more mystery about remembrance.

- **Jigsaw pieces**

The word 're-member' actually means to put back together again. A member is the part of something, like a member of a club, and to re-member is to put back together—to reassemble something. So remembering is putting back together something from long ago so we can see it now in our heads as a memory.

God promises to re-member us; to put us back together again. All of us have messy lives and that we need to be put back together again. On the cross Jesus was asked by the thief at his side to 'remember me'. In other words, to put him back together again and make him into the person he was always meant to be. The man was dying, so this wasn't a physical fix. This was a spiritual fix – restoring the relationship that all human beings are meant to have with God.

Remembrance is a big word. In a year when we remember the cost of war so that we will not forget and therefore be determined never to do the same again; in a year when we remember people from long ago who died to give us freedom and peace; in this year, we can also think of an even bigger remembrance—God's remembrance of us.

A God who remembers our name, remembers our troubles, remembers the hard work that we have done in his name, but who also chooses not to remember our sins because of the cross, so that he can re-member us—put us back together again

