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2-2021

Memory and the Pursuit of Jesus

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Memory and the Pursuit of Jesus

We want our children to “stay in the Church.” Discussions arise that it is more than just membership, that it is about relationship with Jesus, and on to what might be ways by which we can encourage this growth.



▲ Ingrid Weiss Slikkers

We schedule family worship, Sabbath School, Pathfinders, summer camp, and many other home or organizational spiritual formation activities which support development in hopes that what they learn will become integrated into their being.

In reading about the brain and memory in recent months, I find myself pondering the connection. I’m learning that semantic memory remembers rote pieces of information with no necessary emotional response. An example commonly given is multiplication tables. This kind of memory has no real personal experience connected to it and is comprised of basic facts or knowledge about the world while absent of context. In applying this to religious education, I find it easy to quickly list examples of semantic pieces of memory with facts such as the books of the Bible in order or the twelve tribes of Israel.

Procedural memory, on the other hand, is how to do something. Connected to motor skills, it requires movement or action. Early in child development arise walking and talking. This procedural memory eventually builds into tying shoes or riding a bike. As processes are mastered, they can be done on “auto-pilot.” As I had previously done, I thought about it in terms of spiritual formation and wondered if repeating John 3:16, the Lord’s Prayer, praying over meals or daily worship had become procedural, something that was being done without thinking for many of us?

Episodic memory includes events or experiences. It involves conscious thought, not just rote memory. Knowledge of it comes from experiencing inside context. Within this form of remembrance, we are able to

not only recall, but actually “re-experience” the memory with images, feelings, and the meaning it brought to our life. It is highly personal. It is lived experience and encompasses the senses. Experiences like being at the rim of the Grand Canyon where every sense was stimulated, or simply remembering grandma’s voice, laughter and the smells of her kitchen although she has passed away. You are able to “see” it and “re-experience” it.

My parallels then gave me pause. Could it be that we are overly concentrating on semantic and procedural memory with our children? Clearly, both are vital foundations. Semantic memory of Psalm 23 is significant and should be pursued. Procedural memory of church attendance is important. My pause came when I considered that episodic memory is more than just reading or hearing and comes as we experience it. How much effort is going into this area of growth? How can I encourage *knowing* our Savior this year? How can we see, feel, hear *and experience* Jesus?

What is God guiding us to do so that, at the end of 2021, we will be able to use our episodic memory because being with Jesus is as real and present as when we recall sitting around a campfire with close friends last weekend? ■

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