



Re-Membering

Setting in Motion in the Present, Life Rituals, Cues, and Disciplines that will ensure our membership in the communities of meaning when we are no longer present physically in those communities.



Let us remember . . .

- . . . the smiling*
- . . . the laughing*
- . . . the talking*
- . . . the sharing*
- . . . the caring*
- . . . the loving.*

Let us remember the good times always.

These are the words of a greeting card that I found some time ago in the sympathy section of a card shop. I was struck by the counter-cultural language of this verse. It turns around the sentiments normally expressed at a time of death. That is what this concept of re-membering does in the world of grief and loss.

This section of our legacy forum speaks to us both about how we move through the experience of grief after losing someone near and dear, but also we can begin the foundation for re-membering even as we are still alive and well. I am inviting you to think of this word—re-membering, a word we use frequently, in a little different way; not as reminiscing about back when, but imagining what now.



“How we construct death and grief in our talk makes a big difference to how we experience it.” (Hedtke, Winslade, p. 37) After death is a person gone, past tense, no longer part of our lives? Or is there a continuing relationship that still lives with us and is instructive? Hebrews 11:4—“Though he is dead, yet he speaks.”

Re-membering is a current discipline that comes from the school of Narrative therapy and theology. It is primarily based on the work of Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade, from the book; *Re-membering Lives; Conversations with the Dying and the Bereaved*. In this discipline, re-membering is a deliberate act of membership inclusion. It seeks to recognize a person’s membership in community during and beyond physical life. It means that we include our deceased loved ones in our daily lives, in our conversations, in our decision making, in our hopes and dreams and in our celebrations, so that they remain as resources for our living, and members of our community. It means that we can continue to learn from and be influenced by those are part of our community even after they are gone from our earthly presence.

“To re-member is to refuse to allow our loved one’s memory to go unnoticed. Re-membering involves keeping a person’s voice alive through repeating their words, actions and values in relation to new developments in life. It may involve consulting the deceased’s opinion as a resource for dealing with a new challenge. It may involve keeping a place in family gatherings or rituals for someone who is no longer alive.

It may involve telling young children stories about a dead grandparent’s life. It may involve committing oneself to living for some value or purpose that a dead loved one held dear.” (Hedtke, Winslade, p. 10)

Re-membering is NOT about . . .

- progressing through the stages of grief, getting over, moving on
- closure, resolution
- saying goodbye
- detachment

It is about . . .

- a continuation of the values and meaning we have found in life, beyond our lifetime.
- the significance of a life to those who carry on
- continuing membership in the groups that were important in life
- learning to carry relationships differently—the move from external to internal

We have very little control over how and when we will die. We only know that one day, we will. What we do have some control over, is how we will live and how we will be re-membered. Nobody wants to be forgotten. This is an important assumption that we need to recognize in this framework.

We will live on in the stories people tell about us, but we can also leave stories that we want to have people tell about us. We can plant seeds for how we hope to be re-membered, or included in the lives of our families and friends. These are important conversations, important meaning-making exchanges that do influence the future.

The context of re-membering takes on three dimensions:



1. The rest of our lives. What do we want to pass on? Who will carry our stories? There is a great song in the musical “Hamilton,” entitled: “Who lives, who dies, who tells your story.” I get teary when I hear it, for it is so very important. How do we want to be remembered?
2. In the inevitable transition of death, how do we hope to continue inclusion in the lives of our loved ones? How do we hope our loved ones will celebrate life and our lives, even after we have died?
3. The ongoing story. How will we, as the living, take up the stories, incorporate the values, remember and include the deceased in our lives and the lives of those who matter?

The idea that life can go on in story even after our physical body has died underpins this work. Letting people know in life, that they will matter for years to come is powerful. In life, we can participate in the process of finding our meaning and letting others know how we wished to be remembered. Often this process, both in life and in death, finds expression in ritual. Ritual incorporates memories of the past into the present and links it with what we want to have happen in the future. They are markers of what is important, and they help us negotiate the transitions that death requires. Rituals can be healing, reconciling, guiding, sustaining or comforting. “In other words, death affords us the chance to make the most of life, even after we have left behind the act of breathing.” (Hedtke, Winslade, p. 83)
**See “Capturing Your Life: Establishing Rituals and Passing them On.”

To some extent, thinking about remembering differently is very new, but in other ways, it is a path back to what we know to be true. Death does not mean the end of relationship. We are changed by those who have been part of our lives in significant ways, long past the time they die.

Language is so very important. Too often the words that are offered to us at the time of death from the culture are not helpful, and can even be harmful. Like it or not, life AND death are part of our human experience. But they are not the total of our theological understanding as Christians. We read in scripture that life goes on after our time on this earth. That is so mysterious and wonderful and exciting and un-knowable. But what we do know, is that our lives do not come from nothing, they are born of a wealth of generations of lived experience and unimaginable joy and loss. We come into this world on the shoulders of many generations who have gone before us, and we will leave with some kind of legacy that lives on after us. I see this as a challenge and a gift that is in our hands right now.