

but

then

she

AUTHOR  
OF  
*I CHOOSE  
BRAVE*

remembered

Katie  
Westenberg

how to give God your *full attention* in a distracted world

“In this thoughtful book, Katie *sensitizes* us to our many distractions, *calls* us to something deeper, *shows* us fresh ways of remembering Him, and *engages* us with interactive questions that take us into a far richer knowledge of His faithfulness.”

Susan Alexander Yates, speaker and bestselling author of *Risky Faith: Becoming Brave Enough to Trust the God Who Is Bigger than Your World* and *The One Devotional*

“‘Do not forget,’ wrote Moses, David, other psalmists, Solomon, the prophets. Remembering matters to our God. Now, a new voice for a new generation, Katie Westenberg, is exhorting us to remember. We need this challenge. Read her book and take her words to heart!”

Barbara Rainey, wife, mom, and mimi; author, artist, and seminary student; founder of EverThineHome.com

“Katie gently reminds us that with every click and scroll, we are disciplining our minds toward inattention to the things that matter most. *But Then She Remembered* calls us to consider the true cost of our distraction and encourages us to rededicate ourselves to loving God with our whole minds.”

Sarah Beals, author of Joyfilledays.com and writer/contributor at Club31Women

“In an age with endless distractions and jam-packed schedules, when memory tends to be delegated to our phones, it’s easy to get sidetracked, settling into voluntary amnesia. *But Then She Remembered* reminds us of the richness found in remembering and gently guides us in renewing this God-ordained pursuit.”

Heather Haupt, author of *Knights in Training: Ten Principles for Raising Honorable, Courageous, and Compassionate Boys*

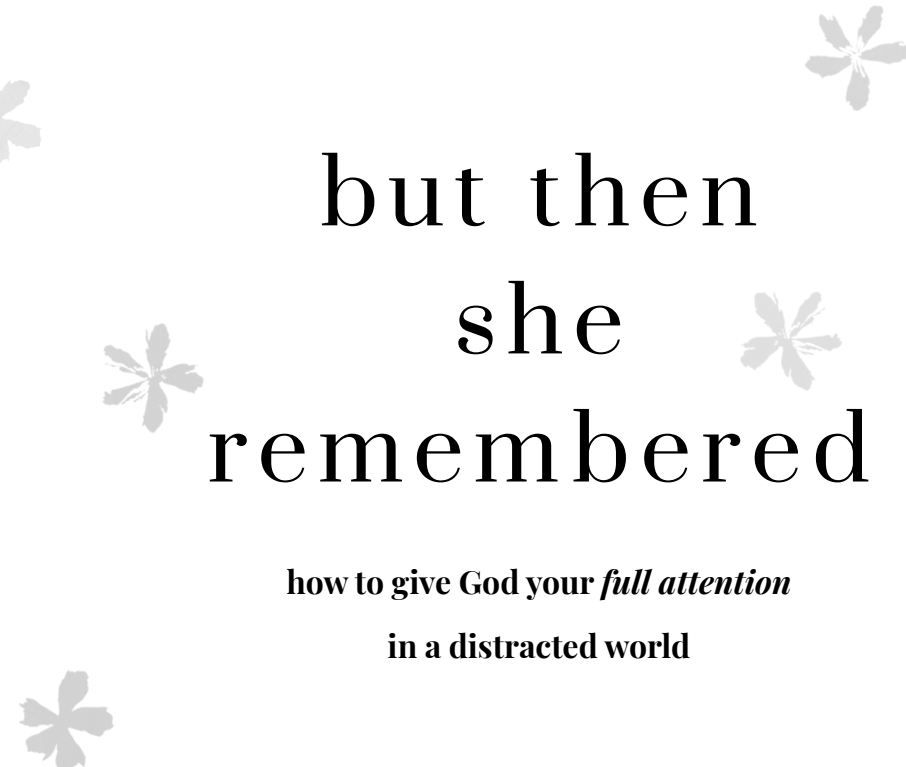
“This book is for anyone who has walked into a room and forgotten what she came for. It’s also for anyone who has walked into a crisis and forgotten God. This book is good. Really good.

In fact, the only bad thing with *But Then She Remembered* is that you will want to remember it—every chapter, every word—and you won't be able to. You will (happily) have to read it again. And again. And . . .”

Jodie Berndt, author and speaker

but then  
she  
remembered



The cover features several light gray, five-petaled floral icons scattered around the text. One is in the top right, one in the middle right, one in the middle left, and one in the bottom left.

but then  
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how to give God your *full attention*  
in a distracted world

Katie Westenberg



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To my grandmother, stalwart in her swishy skirt and bright lipstick in that Sunday morning pew.

And the other, who sang vibrantly, fully off key and yet fully given. To my grandfather who finally found faith and was baptized long after his hair was white.

And the other, who met Jesus on his deathbed.

Your faith and faithfulness have been my inheritance. With David, I give profound thanks; the Lord has given me a heritage of those who fear His name. These words, and the whole of my life, have been hemmed by it.

Thank you.



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## a note for the distracted

I stood in the trailing self-checkout line at Target the day after Christmas, happy to purchase my two three-dollar decorative Christmas trees—70 percent off, friend, a steal—and a young mama who looked as though she may have walked straight out of the oft-recycled meme about moms and Target runs stood just behind me. You’ve seen those memes, right? A mom with a tiny tot tucked carefully in her heaping cart of Christmas clearance items. “Mama.” Her little girl’s sweetly shrill voice invited the attention of shoppers within no small radius. “I think we got . . . *distracted.*” “Yes.” The mama took the pint-sized admonition in stride as she surveyed the overwhelming contents of her shopping cart. “We got very, *very* distracted.”

I smiled back at the mother-daughter pair. They were cute. Stereotypical. But the eavesdropped conversation brought to mind a greater question I had been wrestling with for a few years already—at what point is our distraction . . . *not cute*? We make jokes about our lack of focus, our lack of intention and attention,

on the regular. To the point, apparently, that even our toddlers know the gig. Perhaps the pace of our lives and our distracted state have become so familiar, so commonplace, so normal, that we hardly even notice what is lost. But it is worth considering—what is the real risk of a distracted life?

I have no war to wage with that Target mama because I have been her. At times I still am her, although the terms and conditions vary. I've long run out of toddlers to tote around, but the temptation toward distraction seems quite comfortable to age with me. I can wake early to make space to pause, flip open my Bible, to seek and to knock, only to find my brain is not inclined to follow suit. Even when my body slows, my mind is too often loath to respond in kind. It races or drifts without permission, firing off notifications—the text I didn't respond to, the wrinkled laundry that I will need to tumble through the drier one more time, the world news that seems to be a continual weight, and that phone call I keep failing to make for the appointment I don't really want to have. *What is the weather going to be like today, anyway?* A barrage of thoughts present themselves with a newfound urgency when I try to pause, focus. I forget them with fervor, honestly, until I actually want to remember. And then it all feels important.

*I'm so distracted.*

You're here, friend, so I know you feel it too. But my concern is for far more than just our feelings. My concern is for the greater costs of living a distracted life. What do we stand to lose in a life of whiplashed attention, incubated in an attention economy, where our gaze, our minutes, our thoughts and actions, are the currency the world around us is trading in? Why does the world we live in seem to value our attention more than we do? We know our days are numbered. We know Christ's return is imminent. So what do we stand to lose when we give way to a distracted life? I believe the stakes are high, friend, so I'll give them to you straight.

- **Relationship with Christ** because He said He would make His home with us,<sup>1</sup> and often we're just too busy scrolling, too focused on that to-do list, to even engage with Him.
- **Trust in God** because we're quick to forget His faithfulness in the past and remember He will be faithful in every tomorrow.
- **Connection with others** because we have at least fifteen tabs open in our brains even on a quiet day. We're barely cognizant of all the missed connections.
- **The ability to focus on our work** because we are weighed down with worry of every sort.
- **Rest** because our brains continue to buzz even when our bodies beg for sleep.
- **Peace** because our minds and bodies groan under the stress and strain of constant urgency and we're quick to forget where to find help.
- **Embracing God's grandeur right in front of us**—the beauty in our homes, the extravagance of creation, and the richness of relationship are gifts we miss when we aren't really "here" because our minds are somewhere else.
- **Perspective** because our emotions roll along with the latest news cycle. We feel desperate—or even worse, numb—when we aren't presently anchored by the truth of eternity.
- **Our heritage.** We're living one and leaving one—the substance of which will be precisely the sum of what we have spent our days chasing after.

The stakes are indeed high.

In its simplest form, distraction is a drawing or dragging away from that which we intend to focus on. Its impact often feels

slight, barely noticeable, hardly a problem, but it encroaches beyond the current moment. Distraction becomes a conditioning, a training of sorts. Our eyes, our minds, and ultimately our hearts, become increasingly fitted and shaped for the drawing away. Distraction is a steady tide pounding the surf and over time, reshaping the shore, reshaping us. In distraction, we concede direction. And like the shore shaping tide, it all happens very gradually.

A recent study of a thousand cell phone users in the U.S. revealed that 47 percent consider themselves addicted to their cell phone.<sup>2</sup> Nearly half! We could call the details and parameters of this survey into question. We could argue the definitions and question the terms, but at a most basic level, do you know what this survey tells us? This survey tells us that we aren't naïve. We are not ignorant to the pull to check in or scroll, to refresh the feed or comment, to feel connected or liked or seen. We are not completely unaware of the drawing and dragging away, the hours that are whiled away, but the battle is still likely far greater than we recognize.

What if the physical effects of distraction are only symptomatic of a more important issue in the life of the believer? What if eyes prone to wonder become correlative to a heart that is much the same? What if a mind fueled by pinball patterns of thinking, emaciated from the kind of focus that could provide any real sustenance, becomes a mind that struggles to linger with the Lord, to remember His ways, who He is, and how He loves? What if distraction is far more dangerous than we realize, and by our very design, we were made for so much more?

I've done it just like you have, friend. I've mixed up my kids' names, forgotten what I've walked into a room for, and failed to remember the simple things that matter most in a whirl of my own lack of focus. I have ignored and neglected and been irked by distractions, but I have come to learn that these frustrations are worth noting. External distraction often gives way to internal

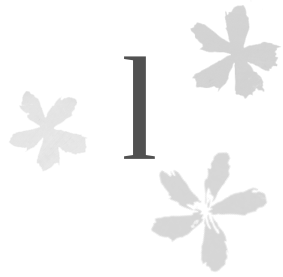
distraction, and it is vital that we lead our hearts with wisdom here. We are charged in God's Word to take every thought captive, but we live in a world that invites us to follow every rabbit trail of thought (and belief) possible. It's all easily accessible via the swipe of your finger, the vibration on your wrist. We navigate our lives on devices that vie insatiably for our attention and continually orient our thoughts toward the immediate and the urgent over the eternal. They craftily play to our weakest vulnerabilities—a fear of disconnection, of missing out, of being unseen. But the greater risk is the reshaping of our souls to mere fragments of their original design—hearts that long to be found in relationship with our Creator, loving Him with all our heart and soul, mind and strength.

Our attempts at reform have been less than helpful. We're still here, drowning in distraction that is warring in our souls. But we know, we must remember, though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war in the flesh.<sup>3</sup> We are empowered to stand firm in the strength and might of the Lord, alert with all perseverance when we take up the armor Christ has offered to us, rather than the wisdom of this present age.<sup>4</sup> We don't need to manage symptoms; we need to unpack the timeless truth of God's Word to speak to our current predicament. The One who created and designed our very minds also created us for obedience here. He designed us for perseverance and endurance. He has fitted us for it, called us to it, and it is time we began to employ the wisdom of the Designer, in the battle to love Him with our minds. This is a fight for focus—a call to lay aside the hindrance so easily ensnaring our minds and our hearts, that we might walk in a manner worthy of our calling. It is time that we remember, friend.

The stakes are high because we are made for more. As believers, we are made to abide in Christ and bear fruit,<sup>5</sup> but far too many of us are plagued with a cancer that just won't quit growing. I believe distraction is causing us to unknowingly quench the Spirit, the very Helper who works to grow that good fruit in us.

Patience is His fruit in us. Joy and peace are the fruit He grows in us. The love we are so desperately trying to drum up for the broken world around us—the kind of love that the Father has for His own Son—is a fruit of His Spirit that has been given to us. I don't know about you, but I want more of that. I don't want to leave that on the table, forgetting what has been afforded to me at no small cost.

I fear we're missing out, friend, and it's not the FOMO we have become accustomed to. We have forgotten what it's like to know God and *remember* Him. In the noise and distraction of this world, we have forgotten what He has promised and how that truth transforms. It not only changes our future, but our day, our minutes and moments, our now. We live in a world that needs to hear and know and see truth on display through virtue—real life lived out by women who know how to pay attention to what matters most. We have the opportunity to be purveyors of that truth in our homes, in our communities, and for the next generation. We have an incredibly high calling. It is time we got serious about paying attention. It is time we got better at remembering. You ready, friend? Let's go.



# the world has lost its memory

I sat across the table from Ross at Panera. We were on a stolen date of sorts, the unplanned, last-minute, squished-in-between-all-the-things kind. Squished-in-between lunches can, by God's grace, sustain a marriage quite well in a busier season of life with four active kids.

He had the pepperoni pizza—flatbread for the purists, but I assure you, its pepperoni pizza for Ross. By contrast, I had a warm Mediterranean bowl with chicken. This might be the simplest way I could introduce you to us. Two decades ago, we got into a legitimate argument over pizza toppings, but we're twenty years in and we have this (mostly) figured out now. We don't share pizza. We run parallel on the things that matter, and freely, gladly dissent on food choice.

But that rarely stops me from trying to convince Ross that my more unique food preferences are really where it's at. "You've gotta try this!" I tell him. "Quinoa and feta. Grape tomatoes



and chopped cucumber. Some sort of tzatziki and . . . and . . .” I fumbled for a familiar word that was somehow just out of mind’s reach. “The, uh . . . this. Why can’t I think of the word?” Ross wasn’t tracking with me. “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” he declared bluntly.

I have little patience with my mind when it plays sluggish games. I tried to get Ross to help me. “Yes you do. It’s mashed up chickpeas. We dip carrots and celery in it (at least I do). Why can’t I think of that silly word?” The light bulb comes on for Ross. “Oh yeah, I know what you’re talking about! But I don’t remember what it’s called either.” And now I’m officially annoyed. How can two capable adults, who have each managed to navigate more than four decades of life and keep four kids mostly thriving, fail to remember the name of the chickpea condiment in my warm Mediterranean bowl. I remembered the name of tzatziki, for goodness’ sake. And we know quinoa—I ruined it for Ross a few years back by serving tabbouleh too frequently. *Tzatziki* and *tabbouleh* aren’t everyday words for us, yet we remembered them without pause. But the moniker for chickpea paste? It vanished.

I reached for my phone to end this silliness, but Ross stopped me short. “Don’t do it,” he urged. “Don’t Google it. That’s lazy. Force your brain to do the work.” It’s a little bit humbling to be a writer, a woman who literally works in the economy of words, and yet be so easily stumped. It’s even more humbling to be writing a book on remembrance and trip over your own forgetfulness in elementary fashion during lunch at Panera. And then to have your husband tell you to *make your brain do the work*? God knew I would need this kind of man.

So rather than be annoyed, we unofficially played a game. I did surveillance around the word, unpacking everything I knew about it, and we would somehow figure it out. *I buy it at Costco and it comes with a little roasted red pepper sauce on top and a few pine nuts. But I’ve also bought the single-serving packs on occasion.* But . . . nothing. The name still evaded us. I imagined the

packaging, the maroon label with matching lid, the lettering and font. Maybe I could *see* the word? Nope. Nothing. *People put it on pita. It's simple to make, add garlic and olive oil. I love it with cucumbers.* Still nothing. I so badly wanted to Google, to phone a friend at the least, but I knew Ross was right. If I want my mental muscles to work, then I need to make them work.

As it goes, the word came out a minute or two later, shortly after we stopped looking so hard for it. “*Hummus!*” I said a tad too loud. The word itself wasn’t all that satisfying. I may have been holding a grudge against it. Really, if I’m going to forget a word, let’s make it something a little more difficult, a little more impressive. But hummus? Yep, hummus.

But you know what was satisfying? The mental effort. It is good to be reminded of the limitations of my human brain as well as the beauty of God’s created design to help me recall and think and *remember*. He created us to remember.

Why begin a book with a light story of common forgetfulness? Because I think you can relate. We live in a fast-paced world with a staggering number of distractions, and it is a real struggle to force our brains to focus anymore. It’s hard to remember. We mostly learn to put up with the forgetfulness, fortifying ourselves with some quick fixes. I see you, Google, lowering the standard on what we deem to be an acceptable level of distraction. We throw around excuses like “It’s just Mommy brain” or “pandemic fog,” and while those may be legit, I’m beginning to wonder if they come with an expiration date. Is this just our new normal?

But that’s not really the point. The point is that distraction and forgetfulness are trending. We have bloated calendars that make us anxious, and fifteen tabs open in our brains. We are multitasking our multitasking, and it’s all laced with legitimate worries of the day, of the world, that feel paralyzing. That’s real. We live in a world that is so loud, so opinionated, that it is not only exhausting, but immobilizing, and we have no idea how to fix it. So we scroll.

There is something far greater at risk here. Distracted eyes are leading to distracted souls. I can forget the word *hummus* for the rest of my life with little ill effect, but when distraction and forgetfulness leech into my soul, I have a far greater issue. Do you see it, friend?

I'm pretty sure mamas have been misfiring their own kids' names for as long as women have been having children, but what happens when the distractions creep further, wider, deeper? What happens when so-called normal forgetfulness inches toward something far more problematic—when in distraction we are tempted to forget what we are called for, called to? What happens when we forget truth? Our muscles of attention, our actual ability to rightly *attend* to something and do the work of remembering, are beginning to atrophy in a world of easy work-arounds and fillers. We reflexively reach for a quick fix or a surface solution, but I believe it's time we begin strengthening these muscles and addressing the root issue. We are quickly becoming a generation of fast forgetters. We are being trained to opt for the immediate at the risk of the important, a bait and switch we barely notice. In conceding eyes that fight for focus and resist distraction, we concede a heart and mind that follow suit. The cost is greater than we realize.

## Time to Stretch

According to some hotly debated research from Microsoft, attention spans have plummeted to embarrassing levels.<sup>1</sup> I'm guessing you aren't surprised. We know this, but peeking at the research is akin to stepping on the scales. We look away, ignore the evidence. In the year 2000, experts estimated that the average attention span of adults was around twelve seconds. Yes, seconds. By 2013, that average dwindled to a mere eight seconds. *Are you still with me?* The stats are not in your favor. Or mine.

The kicker? Well, it's twofold. First, to give a little perspective, the report also claimed that goldfish have an average attention

span of nine seconds. Remember, we're bottoming out at eight . . . so, that is something. But also, in case you'd didn't notice, 2013 was a decade ago. We lost four seconds—a quarter of our attention span—in the thirteen short years between the two surveys. Anyone else feel uncomfortable about where we are likely at today?

It is interesting that in a world of plummeting attention spans, much of the language of attention seems to have been relegated to antiquity as well. No doubt words follow trends and fall out of fashion, but in the process, we sometimes concede clarity. We sometimes concede truth. The word *attention* comes from the Latin *attendere*, which literally means “to stretch toward.” Imagine that—like the zinnia starts in my windowsill right now, daily stretching up and out, directing their stems toward the sunlight by means of a natural process called phototropism. Or the way you incline yourself, leaning in toward a friend in conversation in a crowded and noisy room. We know what it looks like to stretch toward.

From *attendere* we derive the English verb “to attend,” which now commonly means “to be present at.” You attend a school board meeting, attend church, attend a wedding—all of which imply little more than the fact that you were there. No stretching needed. But centuries ago, the word came with far more of its original meaning. To attend to something was not merely to be present in body, but to be fully engaged toward it. To attend was to regard with attention.<sup>2</sup>

Along with *attend* came such verbs as *hearken*, which means “to attend to what is uttered with eagerness or curiosity,”<sup>3</sup> and *heed*, which means “to mind, to regard with care and attend to.”<sup>4</sup> And of course *attention*, which according to Webster's 1828 Dictionary, meant the very act of attending or heeding. Today's definition, according to Webster, is “the act or state of applying the mind to something.”<sup>5</sup> It's not difficult to see that we've lost something in trends and translation. We've robbed the word of

its care and regard, of its eagerness and curiosity. We've forsaken the stretching toward and now find it sufficiently encompassing to simply apply our mind toward things. At least for a solid eight seconds.

In his book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Carl Trueman addresses our temptation to yearn for a lost golden age of the past when pitted against the superficiality of the present. He states, "The task of the Christian is not to whine about the moment in which he or she lives, but to understand its problems and respond appropriately to them."<sup>6</sup> If the modern problem here is the malnourishment of our existing language, considering Trueman's exhortation, I will refrain from bemoaning the richness that has been lost in popular vocabulary and perhaps renounce my personal campaign to bring *hearken* back into style. Even so, I do believe it would benefit us all to remember and consider what it means not just to show up and be present, but to stretch toward, to regard with care, curiosity, and eagerness all that God has placed in our lives. Imagine a world full of women who refused to just show up, but instead attended to all that Christ called her to. I want to be that kind of woman, friend. Let's be those women.

## **Amnesiac**

A strange thing happened in 2020. The world ran out of toilet paper. As is the case with most of life's big or bizarre events, I remember exactly when I first heard the news. Do you? A friend of ours told Ross and me about it. Apparently our nearest Costco was completely out of toilet paper and people were flocking to grocery stores to snatch up the rest of the supply.

We live in a rural town, a good half hour from any city with a Costco. I had just been to our local grocery store, where the shelves were fully stocked. We laughed that those big(ger) city folks must be going a little crazy in the time of COVID, and we

went about our business. The following week, the joke was on us, as not a single store around had toilet paper in stock.

The run on toilet paper reached far beyond my small corner of the world. Scarcity plagued Singapore, Japan, India, Australia, and many other countries around the globe. In Hong Kong it was reported that an armed gang robbed a local store of six hundred rolls of toilet paper in one day.<sup>7</sup> Numerous stories surfaced of physical altercations between shoppers, neighbors, and even family members, duking it out over toilet paper. The world did indeed go a little crazy.

Jokes about the crisis abounded, and everyone seemed to be asking the same question: *Why toilet paper?* For all of the threats a global pandemic may have posed, a run on toilet paper seemed to catch everyone by surprise. While international shipping and supply chains were certainly impacted by the pandemic, in the United States, 99 percent of tissue products are produced within our own borders.<sup>8</sup> Our toilet paper supply was never at risk. As interesting as that may be, I found it far more interesting to learn that this wasn't our first toilet paper shortage. Did you know that?

In 1973, not too many years before I was born, the world was experiencing an energy crisis due to an OPEC oil embargo. Rising prices and supply shortages began to plague the American economy, putting consumers on edge. In December of that year, comedian Johnny Carson lightheartedly read a newspaper article in his opening monologue, which posited misinformation about a potential shortage of toilet paper. The article struck panic in the hearts of Carson's 20 million viewers and, within days, the United States was experiencing its first legitimate toilet paper shortage. In the grips of fear and under the threat of further loss, Americans made a mad grab for the security, for the hope of normalcy, that toilet paper seemed to provide.

As we all nervously laughed at the toilet paper jokes of 2020, chiding the ridiculousness of it all while keeping any eye out for when and where we might be able to replenish our own

dwindling stock, it is fascinating to know that this was not indeed unchartered territory. It was not a foreign response. Nonsensical panic had created a run on paper products in the past. We were asking questions we should have had answers to, but we collectively forgot. And then we laughed about it. That is worth considering.

Centuries ago, a not entirely different group of people struggled with their own fear-driven responses. The Israelites suffered greatly under an oppressive regime, and the scars from their wounds seemed to have a pulse all their own. Consider that, friend. We aren't all that different. In time, the whole tribe of them escaped captivity and their captors were annihilated in their wake. It was no small miracle. This newly liberated people were off to claim new ground, a new heritage in a land well suited to them. But they tired on the journey. They became impatient in the wait. They forgot the miracle that had become their deliverance, the miracle that had been their provision, and the hope of what lay ahead. They forgot their God.

Instead of stretching toward what was ahead of them—the God who had literally been going before them for years now, answering and providing in miraculous ways—they balked under the burden of their present concern.

“What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?”<sup>9</sup> the Israelites cried when they saw the Egyptians pursuing them to the Red Sea.

“Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt,”<sup>10</sup> they spat as they sat hangry in the desert.

“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”<sup>11</sup> they demanded when they became parched on the journey.

Their faith crumbled in their failure to remember God's ways, who He is, and how He loves. Doubt gave way to fear, and they began to long for captivity again. It's heartbreaking to read, isn't it? It's even more heartbreaking to live.

God tenderly taught the Israelites the importance, the greater magnitude, of His work and provision, continually asking them to remember this day and to pass this lesson on to their children.<sup>12</sup> The psalmist did just that. In Psalm 106 we read an earnest retelling of the Exodus story.

Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power.<sup>13</sup>

Do you see it? The Israelites failed to remember God's way, who He is and how He loves. That became the story that was told of them. But the story of God is being retold and remembered by the psalmist here. Since we know the story, if we skim just the subject and verbs in the next few verses, we can learn His ways in a surprisingly clear way:

He rebuked the Red Sea . . . (v. 9)  
he led . . . (v. 9)  
so he saved . . . (v. 10)  
and redeemed . . . (v. 10)

This psalmist opened his song boldly with praise. "Praise the LORD!" he says. "Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!"<sup>14</sup> Despite the forgetfulness of the psalmist's own forefathers, the story of God remained true, and future generations would praise Him for what He did. What mercy! But I wonder how many valleys of doubt and distraction the Israelites could have avoided if they had chosen to pause and remember. I wonder how many of those same valleys we might avoid.



## Double Whammy

Look, friend, I am not saying that forgetting about a toilet paper shortage is akin to forgetting God. Don't read that. But the world as we know it is oriented toward this present moment like never before. We have access to news and more news and new news and what would have never previously been considered news, every second of every day. The world trades in novelty, and slowing down to actually consider what we attend to, what every so-called minor moment of our lives is stretching us toward, takes counter resistance. It takes effort. It takes memory.

Neuroscientists are strides ahead of us here. In a research article for the Department of Psychology at Yale University, researchers addressed the interactions between attention and memory. "Although it is more common to think about how attention improves memory, there is growing appreciation for how memory optimizes attention and perception."<sup>15</sup> The interplay here is interesting. We cannot remember what we do not first attend to, but memory plays a key role in guiding and directing, in "optimizing" attention.

As believers, we are called to be people who set our minds on things above.<sup>16</sup> We are called to remember God and stand firm, and we are called to love God with our minds, which must demand the very attending and memory-making capabilities that He has designed within us. Do you see how this works? He has created us for the very obedience He called us to. In adoration, we get to use the faculties of *His* design to honor Him, to bring Him glory. By His power, He has given us everything we need for life and godliness,<sup>17</sup> even with our aging brains, even in a world of seemingly endless distraction, even when it's harder than ever to pay attention. We do not have to be a people who fail to remember. There is another option.

## but then she remembered . . . to attend



This section is something unique and different, friend. It's my favorite part of the book, where the words that lay flat can begin to take form in *your* heart and mind. Remembering is not an isolated act; it is recall for a purpose, recall that changes us, directing and realigning our hearts with what is true. Don't skip this part. After each chapter you will find space to answer some related questions. These questions will take you directly to the Scriptures, helping you process these ideas in light of God's Word. Take the time to engage with the thoughts and ideas we just discussed and filter what you have read through Scripture. It will require you to attend to God's Word. Please do not resist the time it will take. This is likely the most important part of the book.

Okay, just state it. How quickly did you figure out the word *hummus* before I did in the opening story? Were you even stumped at *all*?

It's humbling to bump up against the limits of memory! **Where do you currently see the most obvious limitations of memory in your own life?** Here's a list to get you thinking:

- I mix up my kids' or other people's names. Y N
- I forget why I walked into a room. Y N
- I lose my phone or keys regularly. Y N
- I have forgotten calendar events or appointments. Y N
- Past dates, years, and events easily slip my mind. Y N
- I am liable to forget the name of random words like *hummus*. Y N

**How do you respond to these limitations?**

**What is your immediate reaction or reflex when you misstep in remembering, when your memory feels fuzzy or temporarily fails you altogether? Do you find it funny or frustrating?**

**Do you feel ashamed, concerned, indifferent, or another emotion altogether?**

Our responses are indicative of our beliefs, so it is wise to consider them.

Let's think about the roots of attention for a moment. If attention comes from the infinitive verb *to attend*, which is derived from the Latin *attendere*, the literal root means "to stretch toward." If you could zoom out on your life, viewing it as an outsider, almost like *you* were one of

the baby zinnia starts on my windowsill, what would you see your life is stretching toward?

The thought of *stretching toward* reminds me of Paul's words in Philippians 3. Take a few minutes to read Philippians 3 carefully.

What does Paul count as loss (v. 8)?

Because of the surpassing worth, value, or excellence of what (v. 8)?

These passages give us a frame of reference for Paul's heart and his resolve. William Blake is famous for saying "We become what we behold." What would you say Paul is beholding?

Paul admits that he has not obtained perfection, but that he presses on, making every effort. Why (v. 13)?

**Do you believe the same thing is true for you?**

**Now take a look at Romans 8:31–39. In your words, use the space below to write the gospel, the good news, in this passage.**

See this, friend. In Philippians, Paul is pressing on—we must be pressing on—toward what has been graciously afforded to us through salvation, the finished work of Jesus Christ. We can be conquerors in the challenges of this life, *more than conquerors* even amidst our very real imperfections and shortcomings, even in the struggles and hardships of this life, through the inseparable love of God (Romans 8:39). **How could attending to this truth and remembering it shape our daily struggle?**

Finally, let's look at Philippians 3:13–14 one more time: “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” **What is the “it” Paul is referring to when he says, “I have not achieved it” (Philippians 3:13 NLT)? Look back at verse 12 in your Bible if you need help.**

Paul hadn't achieved it and neither have we. Take a deep breath, friend. Too often we carry a burden, living under the shame of imperfection that we aren't made to bear.

**What one thing does Paul choose to focus on (vv. 13–14)?**

Forgetting the past of his own mistakes, his own misdeeds, his own failed attempts, in light of the present, he strains forward. The Greek word here is *epekteinomenos*. That sounds fancy, or perhaps odd, or both. It's only used once in all of Scripture, and I don't expect you to remember it or spell it or even say it. (How is that for a book on remembering?) But here is what I want you to know: According to Matthew Henry, the word literally means "to stretch yourself toward."<sup>18</sup> That is sounding familiar now, isn't it? Henry says Paul is "bearing towards his point: it is expressive of a vehement concern."<sup>19</sup>

This is what Paul is calling the church at Philippi *and us* to. Stretch toward what lies ahead. Don't get bogged down with perfectionism, or even worse, the appearance of perfectionism. Press on because Christ has made you His own. Forget all that His forgiveness has covered and strain toward, stretch yourself out toward, what lies ahead, the upward call of God. This is maturity in the life of the believer. We are made to live toward Him. Let's stretch, friend.