



Remember Who You Are

Jim Hawkinson, longtime editor of the *Companion*, recently passed away at the age of eighty. The Covenant Church has lost a patriarch, an elder who knew the way and showed the way. For nearly thirty years he headed up what was then Covenant Publications (now Communications). In that role he was instrumental in nurturing Covenant identity. Through his column in this magazine, signed simply with his initials JRH, he did so monthly. Through the books he published and wrote and the worship resources he compiled, he does so still.

His children and grandchildren spoke with great eloquence and obvious affection at the memorial service. His son Paul recounted how Jim did not lay down huge numbers of rules and regulations in the home. Instead, as any of the five children would head out of the house, he would simply say, “Remember who you are.” The implication: our identity instructs us better than any codification of behavior ever could.

On the other hand, when we forget our identity, we lose our bearings. I am reminded of what led up to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt. Joseph, a Hebrew foreigner and one of the twelve sons of Jacob, was used in remarkable ways to save the nation of Egypt from a desperate famine. As a result, he enjoyed the favor of that Pharaoh, becoming the highest ranking civilian in the land, even though he was an alien. In appreciation for all Joseph had done, his eleven brothers and their families were invited to come and live in the land. Altogether, these twelve tribes prospered peaceably and multiplied until the Israelites were a significant portion of the population.

But then Joseph died. And so did Pharaoh. We are told in Exodus 1:8 that the next Pharaoh “knew not Joseph.” The story of Joseph meant nothing to him. The storyline immediately turned bad. The Egyptians quickly enslaved the Israelites.

Pharaoh neglected the foundational truth of what had brought Egypt to a point of prosperity. As a result, hateful bigotry replaced grateful appreciation. When we become disconnected from what is foundational, we quickly become disoriented and veer off into life-stifling directions.

If, however, remembering who you are intuitively instructs better than endless regulations and codifications, the Covenant Church is in a pretty

good place. We have never been a movement with a lengthy creed like some. We don’t have a thick book of order like others. More than anything, simply remembering our identity helps us find our way forward.

There are four enduring principles whose interplay frames this movement.

To remember who we are is to remember we are people of the book. The Bible serves as our defining frame of reference for all of life as we seek to absorb the mind, heart, and wisdom of God.

To remember who we are is to remember we are people in Christ. To know about God is not the same as knowing God. One name for Jesus in the Bible is Immanuel, which means God with us. Through Jesus, life with God is made possible.

To remember who we are is to remember we are people in mission. We seek to take the fullness of God’s love to the world, living out God’s concern through word and deed around the corner and around the world.

To remember who we are is to remember we are people in community. One of God’s great gifts is others for the journey. The adventure of living with God is something made even richer by connecting deeply with others.

When we remember those four simple things as we walk out the door, we have an internal compass that gives better direction than any possible indices of dos and don’ts.

This summer hundreds of Covenanters gather in Estes Park, Colorado, for our 126th Annual Meeting. We worship God, celebrate what God has done, discern future direction, select leaders, consecrate missionaries, credential and ordain clergy, encourage one another to greater discipleship, make commitments to funding the mission, and hear about the challenges and opportunities in front of us. We see how every single day all around the world God is being worshiped, the lost are being found, churches are being planted, leaders are being trained, the sick are being cared for, the hungry are being fed, those with access to education are learning to read, and people are gaining skills to provide for their families and transform their communities. In it all, we meet new friends and strengthen old relationships. But above all, it is where we remember who we are. ■

Gary Walter is president of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

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