



SERMON BASED STUDY GUIDE

Pastor Charlie Riley

MEMORIAL STONES

OPENING & PRAYER:

Memorial Day calls the heart to remember. Scripture keeps saying it over and over: remember, forget not. Psalm 103 sings it straight: "forget not all his benefits," then stacks the benefits high, from forgiveness to healing to redemption to renewal. The insistence to remember exposes a human tendency to forget, and forgetfulness breeds an unthankful spirit, while remembrance pulls thanksgiving back to the surface.

"Lord, thank You for bringing us together at this moment right now. Thank you for blessing our families by placing us exactly where you want us. We are blessed beyond measure and we thank you for your gifts to us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen."

SCRIPTURE:

Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. **Psalms 103:1-5**

Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap." **Joshua 3:11-13**

Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan. **Joshua 3:17**

Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe; and Joshua said to them: "Cross over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' **Joshua 4:4-6**

Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever." **Joshua 4:7**

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. **John 15:13**

The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, sends this message to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: Build homes and plan to stay; plant vineyards, for you will be there many years. Marry and have children, and then find mates for them and have many grandchildren. Multiply! Don't dwindle away! **Jeremiah 29:4-6**

And work for the peace and prosperity of Babylon. Pray for her, for if Babylon has peace, so will you.' **Jeremiah 29:7 Living Bible**

Seek peace and well-being for the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its peace (well-being) you will have peace.' **Jeremiah 29:7 Amplified**

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5

GO DEEPER:

Joshua's story then lays the pattern in stone. Israel steps into the Jordan, not with a rod in the air but with wet feet in the water, and God piles the river up "in a heap." Twelve stones get lifted on shoulders and set down for a sign. Their job is generational: when children ask, "What do these stones mean?" parents answer with the works of God. Memorials are God's idea. God knows memory needs anchors that do not move.

Stones also stand all over this nation. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier holds guard because life matters. The flag testifies to costly liberty, its colors preaching valor, purity, vigilance, and justice. The anthem is not a tune, it is a story—the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, and the stubborn raising of a bigger garrison flag at dawn so the watching captives could know the banner still waved. Freedom is not free, so honor fits those who paid with their lives. Jesus named that love: greater love lays life down for friends.

Prayer becomes the right response to that trust. If God told exiles to seek the peace of Babylon and pray for its prosperity, then praying for America is not optional piety, it is obedience with practical fruit. When the city has peace, homes have peace. So repentance, intercession, and a fresh dedication of this land to God line up with scripture and with gratitude.

Finally, God does not only set stones in rivers and capitals. Christ calls people living stones. Salvation marks a life like granite. Baptism becomes a marker sunk deep. The filling of the Spirit becomes a stone that cannot be argued away. These personal memorials preach to sons and daughters just like Joshua's pile in the riverbed. When someone asks, "What do these stones mean?" the answer points to the God who forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, and renews.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. Remembering guards gratitude and faith. Remembering keeps thanksgiving alive and clears the fog that forgetfulness lays down on the soul. Psalm 103 ties remembrance to concrete mercies like forgiveness and healing, so memory becomes worship, not nostalgia. When memory grows thin, entitlement swells; when memory is strengthened, humility and praise return. **[03:23]**

2. God ordains memorial stones for generations. Joshua's stones were not sentimental souvenirs but covenant signage meant for children's questions. The question itself is part of discipleship, and the answer anchors identity in God's acts, not in shifting moods. When truth is set "in a heap," culture cannot easily rewrite it, and families have something solid to point to. **[09:05]**

3. Honor costly freedom with prayerful courage. Arlington's rows, the Unknown's vigil, and a flag that kept rising at dawn tell one story: lives were spent so others could live free. Jesus named that love as highest, which pushes honor beyond ceremony into imitation. Courage prays, stands, and serves, not because war is loved, but because neighbors are. **[33:18]**

4. Pray for the land's peace and blessing. Jeremiah's charge to seek a city's shalom was given to exiles, which means prayer is not suspended by imperfect leaders or seasons. Intercession invites God's mercy to outrun a nation's failures and to lift its common life. When a land has peace, households taste that peace; when a land repents, households find hope. **[35:50]**

5. Build personal memorial stones with God. Salvation, baptism, and the Spirit's filling become stones that speak when words feel weak. These markers tell a story a child can ask about and an old saint can lean on. When life shakes, a person does not need fresh proof so much as a faithful memory of where God already met them. **[41:32]**

LEARNING AND GROWING:

1. Psalm 103:2 commands, "Forget not all his benefits." What specific benefits does the psalm list immediately after this command?

2. Jeremiah 29:7 instructs exiles to pray for Babylon's peace. How does this relate to the idea that praying for America is "not optional piety, but obedience with practical fruit"? [35:50]

3. What "memorial stones" (e.g., answered prayers, milestones in faith, baptism) exist in your life? How could you intentionally share their meaning with someone younger this week?

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5. How could you create a tangible "memorial" (e.g., journal entry, photo, object) to remember a recent act of God's provision in your life? Where would you place it to spark conversations?

CLOSING PRAYER:

"Father, thank you for the opportunities to grow in our faith. We will continue to lean on Your Word as we grow to bring people to know you. In Jesus' name we pray, amen."