

Hillcrest Encouragement

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Our Bodies Pass On But Our Memory Remains

One day my wife and her family were at the San Antonio Zoo when my father-in-law bumped into a man with whom he used to work. As they were talking, my wife, Elisa, walked up; immediately, the man called out to Elisa "Hi Rita, how good to see you!" Rita is my mother-in-law. He immediately realized his mistake: on that day, Elisa and her mother of thirty years past looked so much alike that, despite a temporal gulf of decades, he was tricked and the words left his mouth before he could swallow them. The family resemblance did not begin with these generations as flipping through photo albums from my wife's maternal grandmother reveal that in pictures from 60 years ago, she, too, could have been easily mistaken for my wife playing dress-up.

Such examples remind us that human memory is an interesting thing. On one hand, an individual's long term memory can store information for decade upon decade. On the other hand, the atoms within our neurons and the vast majority of our body tissue change out with a surprisingly high frequency. At both the atomic and cellular levels, you are almost an entirely new person from one month to the next. This means that the neurons that produced your thoughts and retained your memories and the muscle fibers that produced your actions change from one day to the next. Nonetheless, we still feel and perceive ourselves to be the same person.

However, there is a time limit on each individual. As each individual passes from this life, so goes with them all of those memories that have not been passed on to others. Yet, there is another sort of "memory" that is passed on to be "remembered" by future generations – our genetic information.

One way to conceive of this "genetic memory" is to consider that the union of a father and mother can be represented by a living being expressed in the life of a child. When the father and mother pass from this life, the child, Lord willing, will go on living. And, consequently, the love of the united father and mother goes on living, too. This child may eventually unite with another to produce a grandchild which represents two pairs of united fathers and mothers. Hence, even though the population of our planet now exceeds 7 billion, each individual is the one flesh expression of a united father and mother who themselves are from united fathers and mothers all the way back to the first father and mother.

Now let us return to the idea that our cells are always changing out and making us new people day by day. Exchanging months for decades we see the same principle at work, except instead of changing out the atoms within our neurons and muscles, the human bodies are being exchanged for other human bodies; and yet, the humans are mysteriously the same. This might yield one explanation for God's loyalty to Abraham, passed onto David and future generations. In them he still saw Abraham, just as within my wife, we can see her mother and grandmother today.

Ryan Jessup