

## THREE KINDS OF MEMORIES

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By Wayne D. Stocks

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Today is my youngest son Nathan's birthday. He's five. I remember the day he was born like it was yesterday. Of my four kids, he is the only one born after I received Christ (something I did shortly after his older sister was born), and I marveled at the grace of God in my life and in that moment. The room was filled with his mother, of course, me, my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law and various well wishers as the day went on. Shortly after Nathan was born, a family friend brought his two older brothers and older sister to the hospital to meet their new baby brother. It was, by all accounts, a momentous day and a memory I will hold on to for the rest of my life. No doubt, Nathan's brother and sister feel the same.

Today, we have another a special day planned. We are off to one of the nation's best children's museums to play and learn and generally have a good time as a family. There will be pouting and probably some yelling and screaming. The kids will balk when they can't have everything they want from the souvenir store, and mom and dad will likely be exhausted by the end of the day. We'll find some place to have a birthday dinner and track down a cake somewhere to celebrate, and of course there are presents to open. My wife and I have worked hard, and spent a little bit of money, to create a memory that will, hopefully, make a mark on his young life and live with him as he grows.

The children's museum we are going to is not in our hometown, so we spent part of yesterday driving to stay at a hotel. We got there about 20 minutes before the pool closed for the night, but I had promised the kids we would swim, so we headed down for our dunk in the pool. The time was short, and we didn't do anything special (just threw a football around in the water), but I have found that those memories tend to stick with my kids as much as, if not more, than the manufactured moments.

### ***Three Types of Memories***

So, what does any of this have to do with children of divorce? As I was reflecting on Nathan's birthday five years ago, and his birthday celebration today, I noted three different types of memories that most kids, and most people, have in their lives:

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1. **MOMENTOUS OCCASIONS MEMORIES.** There are days and memories which are made just because of how extraordinary they are. These can be births, death, marriages, special trips, and unfortunately divorces. You don't have to work at these to create memories because the enormity of the event itself creates memories.
2. **CREATED MEMORIES.** There are memories that we create. Trips to grandparents' houses. Special vacations. Birthday parties. Fourth of July fireworks. We, as parents, often work very hard to create memories for our kids.
3. **SPONTANEOUS MEMORIES.** These memories aren't planned. They are born out of the everyday events of our lives. We don't plan for them, and the moments aren't necessarily monumental, but something makes the moment memorable. A funny story, a fit of the giggles, a unique site or just a really good time permanently implants a time, a place and a memory on our lives.

### *Memories and Children of Divorce*

For children of divorce, they still have all three types of memories, but they take on a new form. Memories of momentous occasions may begin to focus on negative occasions rather than positive. Children of divorce will remember the time their parents told them they were getting a divorce or the night dad walked out. They will never forget the time they waited at the airport and mom never showed up. The momentous occasions in their lives can often focus not on monumental accomplishments but monumental disappointments.

In the hustle and bustle of divorce, and the emotional chaos that comes afterwards, parents oftentimes end up occupied with their own lives. It's not that they ignore their kids all together, but the energy and drive to create memories for their kids takes a back seat to getting through each day.

Spontaneous memories still occur for most children of divorce. They will remember the time they cuddled with mom on the couch to watch that special movie or played catch with dad in the back yard on one of their weekend visits. But, they have another problem with these spontaneous memories. For children from intact families, these tend to be shared memories among all family memories. The child of divorce ends up with two "sets" of spontaneous memories as they shuffle back and forth between houses, and they might not feel free to talk about memories shared with one parent with the other.

### *What Can the Church Do About Memories?*

With the knowledge of these three types of memories, those of us who work with children of divorce can take some steps to help children of divorce create and deal with their memories.

For momentous occasion memories, we can give children of divorce a chance to talk about the new memories in their lives. All too often, the adults in these kids' lives do not spend time asking them how they feel about these life-changing events that have come into their lives.



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When it comes to created memories, we can help to create positive memories for these children. Whether it is Vacation Bible School, a summer camp or a simple outing, plan things and events in your ministry to create opportunities for positive memories for children of divorce.

As for spontaneous memories, you can create environments where these memories can take hold. You can also give these kids a place where they are free to talk about memories with both their mom and dad.

