



Remembering Who We Are

In Three Easy Lessons

By Bro. Chuck Maddox, Jr.

“Back to school...back to school...to prove to dad that I am not a fool.” In the famous words of Adam Sandler, many of us will return to school this fall after a refreshing, yet brief, summer vacation. Reflect on your summer break: did you go to GMBA camp? Did you participate in a Youth in Action tour? Did you dive deeper into the scriptures? Did you watch Netflix for eight solid hours? (There’s no judgment here.) Did you sleep until 2:00 in the afternoon? Hopefully, your summer was filled with people you love, activities you enjoy, and time well spent.

I personally enjoyed my summer. I’m a teacher, and this fall, I am starting my sixth year of teaching. While I love my job, nothing makes me happier than summer vacation. My summers are usually filled with no alarms set on my phone, peacefully drinking coffee at home and spending time with family and friends from around the country. More importantly than slowly sipping coffee in my pajamas, I find the summer to be a time to refresh, reconnect, and revive my relationship with the Lord. Not only do I feel physically recharged after summer vacation, I also feel *spiritually* renewed. GMBA Camp is the activity to which I most look forward in the summer. Thankfully, I have never missed a GMBA Camp in my entire life. God has blessed me with the ability to attend campout year after year, and for as long as I can remember, I have always left Camp feeling ready to take on the world.

But...

September can be a month of forgetfulness. We can forget how we felt at camp. We can forget how we renewed our relationship with God throughout the past few months. We can forget to study the scriptures while we are up to our necks in school work. To combat this temporary amnesia, I have three life lessons we can apply to our lives to strengthen our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and most importantly, with the Lord.



Lesson #1: Remember Who You Are

One: **remember who you are.** The new school year brings new people into our lives. New people bring different opinions of what is right and wrong. New opinions make us reconsider the personal beliefs we have held on to for so long. Mufasa's famous words from *The Lion King* should ring true in our hearts: we must remember who we are. As Simba looked deeply into his reflection in the water, he saw his father come down from the sky to remind him who he is. How often does the Lord remind us who we are? How does the Lord remind you personally? In what ways does He speak to you? You are a child of the one true King. Hold fast to your personal beliefs. Do not let others negatively influence the way you think. Remember who you are.

Lesson #2: Be Content

Two: **be content.** Recently, I have been reading about body images in both men and women. Not surprisingly, even though body image issues are more commonly reported from women, men suffer with body image issues just as much as women. Due to mass media, celebrities, and the latest health trends, most of us have a convoluted idea of how men and women should look. High school and college is an excellent breeding ground for comparing ourselves unhealthily against other people. *Is she prettier than I am? I wish I had definition like he does. Why can't my face be as clear as hers?* We compare ourselves endlessly to other people, and in the process, we beat ourselves up. We tell ourselves we're not good enough. We're not thin enough. We're not pretty enough. We need to

stop these comparisons. God calls us to a higher calling than this. In Philippians 4:11, we're reminded of the following: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." God is telling us in **whatsoever** state we are in to be content. Comparing ourselves with others feeds our human desire to feel deficient in some way. God did not make us to feel deficient in any way; rather, we are made whole through Jesus Christ. Be content.

Lesson #3: Never Stop Growing

Three: **never stop growing.** Chia pets have always fascinated me. Their theme song alone is enough to make you want to go to the store and buy one. When you first take the chia pet out of the box, you wait with baited breath as the first sprouts of



Photo by Duane Werley

of green start to appear. Before your very eyes, hair starts coming out of your pet with a vengeance. You watch and watch, never realizing one day the growth will stop and all of the sprouts will die. To your shock and disappointment, your chia pet reaches the end of its life and all of its hair slowly falls to its side, withering into nothingness.

How often are we like chia pets? I have acted like a chia pet in certain seasons of my life. Throughout summer vacation, I grow as fast as I ever have: I am studying the scriptures, looking forward to Wednesday night services, and praying throughout the day and before bed every night. But as the school year creeps into my life, the habits I made in the summer slowly start to fade away: I don't study the Word of God as often because I have textbooks I need to study, I no longer look forward to Wednesday night meetings because I have a paper due on Thursday morning, and a month into the semester, I no longer go to church during the week. I pray laying down in bed instead of on my knees because I am just so exhausted from the day. Just like a chia pet, I grew with uncontrollable energy in the summer, but when the school year started, the growth began to slow until all of my sprouts died. God doesn't want us to be like the seeds that fell on the stony ground. In Matthew 18, Jesus tells us of

seeds that sprung up quickly, but when the heat of the day came upon them, they withered up and died because they were unable to take root in the ground. Don't let the heat of the semester wither away your passion for the Lord. Hold onto your summer growth and continue to grow throughout the school year. Never stop growing.

Sometimes I wish summer could last all year, but all good things must come to an end. In the words of Dr. Seuss, "Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened." We all feel that end of summertime sadness when we're looking over our school schedules and reading our syllabi only to realize we will have to write twenty-seven papers this semester. Don't let this school year be a year of forgetfulness. Remember where you came from and where you're going. Be content with who God made you to be, and never stop growing in the Lord. I pray the Lord will bless everything you do this semester to His honor and glory.

Now put down this article and hit the books!

Remember Who You Are!

Do you find yourself in November realizing that you fell completely behind (or off) your scripture reading plan for the year? Do you find that you forgot to pray before you fell asleep for the sixth time in the week?

If so, then we challenge you to find a "spiritual buddy" in your branch to hold each other accountable and share your experiences and challenges in keeping up with your own spiritual lives. It can be hard to wait until Sunday mornings to talk to someone!

We also encourage you to journal or blog to keep your thoughts and feelings going. And of course, we have monthly SSP calls that can help keep you accountable.

We pray that all of you have a fantastic school year, and we encourage you to remember what the Bible says in Titus, "...but according to His mercy He saved us..." (3:5).

So remember **who you are**: a redeemed child of God!