

May 27, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2018 David J. Whitcomb

REMEMBER Deuteronomy 8

Diets are a lot like habits. It is good to develop good habits and bad to develop bad habits. Habits are lifestyles. You do a particular action or think a particular thought or respond a particular way over and over until that thing becomes a natural and expected reaction. It is surprising how quickly we can develop bad habits and how long it takes to get out of the pit of bad habits.

That is why doctors often tell their patients who need to lose weight that they will need to develop a new lifestyle. A lifestyle consists of certain habits. We wake up about the same time every day, eat pretty much the same thing for breakfast (if we eat breakfast), get dressed, go about our daily duties, come home and go through a repetitive cycle Monday through Friday, go to bed, get up and repeat. The person desiring to lose weight will need to inject into that cycle some “dos” like do get up in time to exercise, do stay active, or do check your weight. And he or she will need to inject some “don’ts” like don’t even think about donuts, don’t eat the wrong food, don’t eat too much, and don’t eat too often.

Wouldn’t it be nice to have a coach who could be beside you all day long telling you to remember these things? Someone like a mother who could say, “Did you exercise today?” “Did you eat enough proteins and stay away from the carbs?” Reminders like that are necessary for us to make any kind of good progress in life.

That is the benefit of the good habit of communing with God through Bible reading and prayer every day. When we spend a few minutes each day in the Bible and talking to God, He reminds us of the kinds of things that will make us more like Christ, and He reminds us of how subtly deceitful the desires of our flesh can be.

That was the essential nature of Moses’s speech to the people in Deuteronomy eight. As he was preparing the people to go into the Promised Land and take possession of God’s gift to them, he reminded them that there were certain things they needed to remember. They needed to remember how God used His plans, purposes, and commands to humble them so that they would depend on Him. They needed to remember that all of the blessings they were enjoying came from the LORD’s hand of mercy. They needed to remember that wandering off to serve the non-gods of their neighbors would bring dire consequences.

Come to think of it, those are the kinds of things we ought to remember. In fact, it seems like building each other up in the knowledge of Christ, admonishing each other, stirring each other up to love and good works, looks a lot like us reminding each other to remember.

Remember the LORD’s plan (vv.1-6).

The Lord gives commands with the intent that His people keep them. *The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers (v.1).*

The *whole commandment* included the entire law. The LORD expected His people to be careful to do all the civil, ceremonial, and characteristic (moral) law that God gave through Moses. In our last study in the previous chapter, we saw how God made a direct connection between the keeping of the law and His blessing. Moses repeated that connection here between keeping the law and success in possessing the land, living, and multiplying.

God does not require or expect us to keep the aspects of the ceremonial law which Jesus fulfilled or the civil law which no longer applies since there is no Theocracy called Israel. The commandment for us is the moral law of God. That law is revealed in the Ten Commands, the Great Command, the Sermon on the Mount principles, and the Epistolary imperatives. It is still relevant for those who have been born again by grace alone through faith alone.

We must never forget that there is a direct connection between us keeping the commandment and God’s blessing – because we are

able to keep the commands only through the grace God supplies. Therefore, by God's grace we are receiving His added blessings. Those blessings might include health and physical well being. The blessings certainly includes the greater blessing of being continually conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Against the backdrop of the importance of remember to keep God's law, Moses pointed out this amazing principle of how the LORD humiliates on purpose. How God humiliated His people is described in verses two through four. Moses reminded the people that God led in specific ways in order to humble their fathers, and to some extent this second generation also. *And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you (v.2a).*

Many of these people (the second generation) had been alive much of the 40 years of wandering. Many had probably been children when God delivered them from Egypt's bondage. Those who were too young to have experienced these things would have heard the stories. Therefore, all of God's people needed to remember all the amazing acts of God that benefitted His people. And they needed to remember why and how God humbled His people. To humble is to bring low, to reduce to the lowest level. When the superior humbles the inferior, it is to show how dependent that inferior is. Humility reveals that you have nothing to offer, no defense, no means or ability to barter.

This is such an accurate picture of the need in the Christian's life to remember all of God's acts in our behalf. Remember when you became aware of sin in your life. Remember when you said the same thing about your sin that God says. Remember when you began to have spiritual understanding and could read the Bible and understand it. Remember how far God has brought you in sanctification.

It is good to remember that God humbled the people in order to reveal their hearts. Moses taught that God was *testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not (v.2b)*. God never tests anyone in an effort to learn something hidden about people. He knows every secret, every motivation, every desire of every heart. The test is to reveal the truth to the individual being tested. Also in the test, He brings out into the open that which is hidden for His glory only and as justification for His covenant

relationship. God revealed over and over to the people and now to subsequent generations that His chosen people Israel, by and large, were stubborn, stiffnecked people who were bent on having their own way. Surely that is not one of our characteristics, is it?

Furthermore in the testing process, God humbled the people through practical physical needs. *And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know (v.3a)*. A couple of million people stranded in the desert with no visible means of food or water would definitely be a humbling experience. It was no accident. God brought the people to the point of hunger. Then when they acknowledged their hunger, God gave them weird, unfamiliar food.

Unfamiliar food is generally undesired food. In a very real way, most people have to humble themselves in order to eat liver and onions for the first time. Or if you visit a culture that is quite different from your own, you better forget about eating at McDonalds. Missionaries learn very quickly how to humble themselves to eat strange food. In fact, sometimes it is better not to know what you are eating.

Through such very practical circumstances, God humbled the people in order to teach them to depend on Him. He did it *that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD (v.3b)*. Maybe the people who God delivered from Egypt wondered why God gave a strange food called manna when He could have miraculously provided lamb, beef, chicken, leaks and garlic like they ate in Egypt?

The people needed to understand that the strange, novel, miracle food was available only because of God's word. Had God not spoken they would have starved. Human logic would have concluded that it was a coincidence if thousands of beef cows wandered into the camp, kind of like quail that came with the wind. But God spoke and there was flaky food on the ground in the morning.

This historical fact is an important reminder for us that: Nothing is impossible with God. Nothing is possible without God. Do you believe that? If you really believe it, you are willing to act on it.

Actually, this speech from Moses seems a bit strange in that through it he taught that God humbled the people by providing for

them. How does that work? Moses reminded the people that *Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years (v.4)*. Picture the matter like this. It is humiliating to find yourself in dire circumstances unable to pay your bills or worse, unable even to provide basic staples like food for your family. But the real humiliation comes when God sends help through His people. Being truly dependent seems to take away our self-worth.

Why does God allow people to end up in such situations? Moses gave the answer to that questions in verses five and six. God reminds His children that we are dependent on Him because He acts as a loving heavenly Father. *Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you (v.5)*.

Bringing us to the point of humility is simply God's process of discipline. Discipline is the process of showing us the error of our ways, our need to grow in a particular way or area, that we are not as important as we think we are, or that we are not independent of God. Ultimately, imposed discipline is teaching us how to set up righteous boundaries and expectations ourselves. Wise parents impose discipline so that children can learn self-discipline.

Therefore, God teaches us self-discipline through humbling experiences in order to teach us how and why to walk in His ways. *So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him (v.6)*. We must be taught through discipline because walking in the LORD's ways is not natural. The natural way is according to the desires of the flesh. Because the flesh is permeated by sin, it is a way in conflict with God's righteousness. Left to ourselves with no discipline from God, we will walk in the way of Satan and live like children who deserve God's wrath. When our loving heavenly Father disciplines us, He is bringing this truth about us to light.

Likewise, keeping the LORD's commands is not easy. In fact, keeping God's commands is impossible for unregenerated people. And keeping the moral law of God completely is impossible even for born again people indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But having the desire to keep God's moral law, and striving to keep God's moral law through the grace He provides, comes about as God disciplines us.

Also, verse six reminds us that maintaining awesome respect for God requires discipline. People are afraid of God when He reveals

His majestic power through phenomenal acts of nature or miracles. But maintaining a healthy, awesome respect for God is developed as He disciplines us. That is how we learn to say "No" to self and "Yes" to God consistently.

Remember the LORD who gives the blessings (vv.7-18).

The LORD's blessing to His people is briefly described in verses seven through ten. Here we discover that the LORD's blessing is huge. *For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper (vv.7-10)*. As the LORD had promised His people from the beginning, He was about to shower them with material blessing. Even the spies who discouraged God's people from obeying Him forty years earlier admitted the immensity of God's blessings.

Sometimes, God still blesses His people materially. For example, what are modern Christians to do with Jesus' promise to Peter? *Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30)*.

Sometimes God does choose to bless His servants materially. In fact, comparatively, God's servants in America enjoy great material blessing. But the teaching that we can buy off God and force Him to give us material blessing as the health, wealth, and prosperity movement teaches is heresy. And greater than all the material blessing is spiritual blessings from God. "That we should be called the children of God" is beyond comparison. What is the value of the blessing that we should not receive God's wrath for our sins? To what will we compare the blessing of becoming less sinful and more like Christ through sanctification? And what value will you place on the blessing of eternal life lived in the presence of our Savior?

What we must remember as we enjoy these blessings is that it is the LORD's blessing. *For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land (v.7a)*. God's people needed to remember well that all the material blessing was from God. We need to remember that all the blessing we enjoy is from God. That is the expected response to the LORD's blessing. God gave gifts to His people so they could enjoy them. *And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you (v.10)*.

God is no shrew. He is not a killjoy who disdains the thought of His people enjoying pleasure. God is the author of pleasure. But our pleasure must be derived from His provision, focused on His character, with thankfulness to Him for it. In that sense, no child of God can take pleasure in sin with a clear conscience.

But while we are enjoying God's blessings (just as He desires for us to do), we must be careful not to forget God. Moses said, *Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end (vv.11-16)*.

As you might expect, this is one of the longest sentences in the Hebrew Bible. The warning is clear and simple: While you are enjoying all of God's blessings, don't forget where they came from. This is kind of like the family who God blesses financially so that they are able to buy a nice boat. God who gives good gifts to His people is all for them going out on the lake for a relaxing day. But then, the blessed family discovers that Sunday is a great day to be on the lake. So they neglect meeting with God's people for corporate worship to praise and thank God for His many blessings while they are out enjoying God's blessing.

A similar thing happens to people who God blesses spiritually only to have them come to the conclusion that they are able to serve God because they are smarter, more dedicated, more righteous than the average Christian.

Take care, therefore, not to draw wrong conclusions. *Beware lest you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth." You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day (vv.17-18)*. Whatever blessing you enjoy, you didn't do it. Everything you can do and enjoy is God's gift.

Remember not to go after other gods (vv.19-20).

It seems impossible, and yet there is good reason for God to warn His people to guard against chasing lesser gods while they were enjoying the LORD's blessings. The journey starts by forgetting God. So the warning, *And if you forget the LORD your God (v.19a)*. How can you forget God?

We tend to forget God when we get busy taking care of the responsibilities He gave us without stopping to think that we need His grace to take care of them. Things like rearing our children or like taking care of His ministry cause us to forget the important thing. We even get distracted enjoying the blessings God gave without stopping to remember the Giver of the gifts. It is a bit strange but true that times of blessing, prosperity, and ease are the times when we are most likely to get distracted with Vanity Fair going on around us.

How can we tell when that happens? Certain practices reveal that we have forgotten God. We do not desire to fellowship with Him in His Word. We do not desire to communicate with Him in prayer. We can get along just fine without interacting with His people. We no longer see His hand at work in real life. We no longer see people around us as sinners who need Christ's forgiveness. And one day we realize that there is almost no difference between us and the co-worker who makes no pretense of knowing God.

That journey of forgetfulness leads to serving and worshiping non-gods. Moses's warning was, *"Don't forget . . . and go after other gods and serve them and worship them" (v.19a)*. The false gods that

tempted ancient Israelites are pretty well identified. But what are the gods of your age? Materialism, sports, entertainment, self and more being invented daily. Do you serve them?

God's solemn warning should be a sufficient deterrent to keep His people from chasing lesser gods. *"I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God"* (vv.19c-20).

The dire warning is that people who forget the true God to chase lesser gods will perish for their disobedience. That was obvious by the fact that God had already destroyed the parents of these people over a forty year period. It was not a long coincidence, but the direct fulfillment of God's promise to destroy them for rejecting Him to serve self and other gods. Of course, in our cases, God will never take away salvation from His chosen people who He saves through faith in Christ. But God does set them aside. Paul confessed, *But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified* (1 Corinthians 9:27). And sometimes God even takes them home early.

Actually, the number of people who forget God and serve lesser gods is as numerous as the nations. In a sense, all of us are born forgetting our God. We naturally do not have respect for our Creator. The result is eternal destruction, eternity separated from God. Far better to remember our Creator, confess our sins against Him, call upon Him to forgive our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ.

It is so important for us to remember why God disciplines us. It is important to remember all the incredible blessings that God gives us and to enjoy them. It is very important for us to remember Who gives the blessings and guard ourselves lest we get distracted from the Giver and wander off to serve lesser gods.