

Don't Forget!

Deuteronomy 8

Brandon Stern October 4, 2020



It truly is a joy to be with you this chilly but beautiful fall morning and to open God's Word together. I want to invite you to please turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 8. As we've seen throughout our study in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is speaking to the people of Israel in the midst of a major life transition for the nation.

For 40 years they have been wandering around in the wilderness, living in tents and constantly dependent on the Lord to provide food and water for them. However, now the moment they've all been waiting for has arrived. They are about to enter into the Promised Land, where they will have nice homes to live in and all kinds of delicious food to enjoy. Life as these Israelites have known it is about to change drastically.

Moses wants to help the people make this transition well. He knows that both prosperity and adversity present different challenges and opportunities for the people in their relationship with God. So here in chapter eight, Moses continues to address the nation to prepare them for entering the land.

As I read this passage, I invite you to imagine yourselves there among the Israelites that day. Imagine that you were born in the wilderness and all you have known is the struggle of wilderness living. Imagine that now the Promised Land you've heard talked about your whole life is right there before you. It's so close you can almost taste it. And now Moses, your leader, gets up and says:

¹ Carefully follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase, and may enter and take possession of the land the LORD swore to your ancestors. ² Remember that the LORD your God led you on the entire journey these forty years in the wilderness, so that he might humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

⁴ Your clothing did not wear out, and your feet did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Keep in mind that the LORD your God has been disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. ⁶ So keep the commands of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and fearing him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams, springs, and deep water sources, flowing in both valleys and hills; ⁸ a land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where you will eat food without shortage, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you will mine copper. ¹⁰ When you eat and are full, you will bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

¹¹ Be careful that you don't forget the LORD your God by failing to keep his commands, ordinances, and statutes that I am giving you today. ¹² When you eat and are full, and build beautiful houses to live in, ¹³ and your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold multiply, and everything else you have increases, ¹⁴ be careful that your heart doesn't become proud and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, a thirsty land where there was no water. He brought water out of the flint rock for you. ¹⁶ He fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your ancestors had not known, in order to humble and test you, so that in the end he might cause you to prosper. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and my own ability have gained this wealth for me," ¹⁸ but remember that the LORD your God gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm his covenant he swore to your ancestors, as it is today. ¹⁹ If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve them and bow in worship to them, I testify against you today that you will certainly perish. ²⁰ Like the nations the LORD is about to destroy before you, you will perish if you do not obey the LORD your God.

Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for speaking and revealing Yourself to us. Thank You for making known to us the path of life, that in Your presence there is fullness of joy and at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Father, I pray that by Your precious Holy Spirit You would take Your Word and implant it deep within our hearts today, so that we never forget You and turn away to lesser things. Guard us from foolishness and sin, and give us

grateful hearts that delight themselves in You and all You offer us in Christ Jesus, Your Son. It's in His holy name we pray. Amen.

This text breaks nicely into three main sections:

- God's Discipline (8:1-6)
- God's Goodness (8:7-10)
- God's Warning (8:11-20)

God's Discipline

Let's look first at God's discipline in verses one through six. In this passage, Moses is reminding the people of their time in the wilderness. The past 40 years have not been great for Israel. They have had to wander around in a desert until an entire generation dies off. Life has not always been easy and I'm sure many of them are ready to forget the past and get on with the future.

But Moses knows better than that. Moses knows how important it is for the people to remember their past—specifically to remember the lessons God's fatherly discipline taught them in the wilderness. To forget these lessons would not bode well for the people of Israel. Moses goes so far as to say that their life and prosperity in the land is dependent on them, remembering the lessons God has been teaching them in the wilderness these past 40 years.

So let's look at this first section together. In verse five, Moses reframes Israel's understanding of their wilderness wandering, saying, *"Keep in mind that the Lord your God has been disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son."* Moses wants the people of Israel to realize that the past 40 years of struggles and hardships have not been meaningless. They have actually been the disciplining grace of God at work in their lives. Like a good father preparing his child for adulthood, God has been disciplining the people in order to prepare them to enjoy the good land He is now giving them.

It's important for us to realize that God's discipline doesn't only, or even primarily, come into our lives when we sin, as if God is fairly absent from our lives and only shows up when we step out of line, to snap us with a ruler. No, that is not the God we serve. God is like a good father whose discipline is a part of his loving and committed relationship to us, designed to train us and grow us in holiness.

So like any loving parent, God desires the very, very best for His children, so He customizes hardships and challenges in our lives for our good and growth. We see this clearly in verse 16. Look at the end of that verse with me. All the humbling and testing that God took His children through was so that in the end God might cause them to prosper. God is a good, good

Father Who is fiercely committed to His people's good. As Hebrews 12:10 says, God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness.

Moses wants the people to understand that what they have been going through the past 40 years has been the loving and gracious discipline of their heavenly Father. God has been at work, not only to correct their sinfulness, but to teach them valuable lessons so they can grow and mature as a nation. Moses pleads with them to not forget the lessons God has been teaching them. What are these lessons Israel is to remember? Look with me at verses two and three:

Remember that the LORD your God led you on the entire journey these forty years in the wilderness, so that he might humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

The good lessons God was teaching His people is that true life is found in humble dependence on the Word of God. Notice how God did this. Moses said, "God humbled you by letting you go hungry." God wanted His people to learn that they are completely dependent on Him for everything. He does not want them foolishly looking to their own strength to meet their own needs, but to Him. So He lets them go hungry, then miraculously provides manna for them to eat.

What was so humbling about manna is that there was absolutely nothing the Israelites could do but receive it. They couldn't plant it. They couldn't make it. It simply rained down from heaven each day for them to eat. It was a straight-up gift from the gracious hand of their loving heavenly Father. In providing for them in this way, God was humbling them and teaching them to live in daily dependence on Him.

God does the same for us, doesn't He? There are times in our lives when God withholds or takes things from us, not because He is cruel and unloving, but because He loves us and wants us to grow closer to Him. So the question before us is: do we functionally believe this? Do we view the hardships and challenges that come into our lives as evidence of God's fatherly love, care and commitment to us? Or do we view them as evidence that God must not care about us?

How you answer this question will drastically affect your relationship with God. If, by God's grace, you begin to see the hardships of life as the loving discipline of your heavenly

Father, then your life begins to be filled with evidences of God's love for you. Everything from the minor irritations of life—like traffic jams or other frustrations—to even some of the more major difficulties of life can begin to be seen as the gracious discipline and care of God as your loving heavenly Father, not as meaningless suffering.

This of course does not mean that the bad things that have happened in your life are good. No, evil is evil. Sickness, suffering and death are terrible, painful things that one day will be eradicated from this world when Jesus returns. But what it does mean is that in the sovereign hand of your heavenly Father, everything that happens to you is ultimately for your good and growth in Christ. Please hear me on this. You are not living in this world as an unloved orphan, but a deeply loved son or daughter of God.

This means that the clogged toilet becomes a sign of God's loving formation of you. This means that the difficult situations you find yourself in as a result of COVID 19 have been lovingly orchestrated by your heavenly Father for your good. This means that there is not a moment of your existence that does not have the loving hand of your heavenly Father all over it.

So Tim Chester, in his excellent book Enjoying God, encourages us that whenever we face hard times, we should pray, "My Father, thank You for this. Please use it to make me more like Jesus." So God is lovingly, graciously disciplining His people. He wants us to learn to humbly depend on Him for everything. I love what one commentator says about this: "What God wanted His people to come to believe is that the key to life is not found in the food one eats, but in the nourishment that comes from the mouth of God." Look again at verse three:

He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not know, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

That word "live" is very important. It is ultimately not manna, but the Word of God, that provides life for God's people. Notice what Moses says in verse one: "*Carefully follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase, and may enter and take possession of the land the Lord swore to your ancestors.*"

Skip down to verses 19 and 20:

If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve them and bow in worship to them, I testify against you today that you will certainly perish. Like the nations the LORD is about to destroy before you, you will perish if you do not obey the LORD your God.

Do you see what the Lord is teaching us? He is teaching us that true life is found in obedience to the Word of God, in loving God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength, as we saw last week in Deuteronomy 6. So to fail to do this and reject God's Word is to choose death for yourself. It's to become like the godless Canaanites, the very people they were supposed to destroy. So Moses pleads with them, and with us, in verse six: "*Keep the commands of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and fearing him.*" Don't forget the lessons He's taught you in the wilderness. Don't forget that life is found through humble dependence on the Word of God.

So verses one through six teach us about God's discipline. As a loving Father, God was teaching His people to humbly depend on Him.

God's Goodness

Now let's look at God's goodness in verses seven through ten:

⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams, springs, and deep water sources, flowing in both valleys and hills; ⁸ a land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where you will eat food without shortage, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you will mine copper.

¹⁰ When you eat and are full, you will bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

God is like the loving father on Christmas morning who can't wait to show his kid the amazing gifts he got for them. It's like He just can't contain His excitement as He describes the wonderful, amazing land He has for His people to enjoy. In contrast to the dry wilderness they've been living in, this land is flowing with water. There are streams and springs everywhere. They will be able to drink, swim, fish, play and skip rocks across the water.

The abundance of water means there will be an unlimited buffet of delicious food for the people to enjoy, full of flavors that will make their taste buds dance with joy. The hills and rocks are filled with metals for all kinds of technological advances. The possibilities before the people are endless. God has spared no expense in the richness and abundance of the land He is giving them. Rather, like any good father, it thrills God's heart to give good gifts to His children.

So what about you today? Does this description of God's glad-hearted generosity and goodness fit your picture of what God is like? Would you view God as someone who is stingy, as

a father who is reluctant to give gifts to his children; when he does give, he gives begrudgingly? If this is your view of God towards you, I want you to know that that stingy, begrudging view of God comes from Satan and could not be farther from the truth.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been in the business of trying to get God's people to believe God is withholding good from them, that God doesn't really care about them, that He isn't really good, loving, generous and kind. The reason Satan works so hard to distort our view of God is when we doubt God's love for us, we will not trust Him, love Him or praise Him. Instead, we will grow suspicious of Him. We will begin to think the good life is actually found outside of God and His Word. This will send us chasing after the wind, looking for the joy and satisfaction our hearts long for in all the wrong places. Nothing pleases our enemy more than this.

Dear Christian, dear beloved son or daughter of God, do not fall for Satan's lies. Do not let his forked tongue sow seeds of doubt in your mind about your Father's heart toward you. God loves you. God's heart toward you is one of generous, overflowing love for you. God delights in you and in giving good gifts to you.

Every pleasure you enjoy—the ray of warm sunshine on your cheek, the beauty of a flower, the delightful sound of leaves crunching underfoot, the love of a friend, the playfulness of a puppy, the warmth of a blanket that many of you are enjoying right now, the breathtaking beauty of a sunset, the sweetness of sugar, the saltiness of salt, the delightful combination of both in sea salt caramel chocolate, plus a million other pleasures this world has to offer—these are all put here by your loving heavenly Father. God is not anti-pleasure. He has created a wonderful world full of beautiful delights and has done it for us to enjoy.

So how should we respond to such lavish goodness? In two ways that go hand in hand. Look again at verse ten: *“When you eat and are full, you will bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.”* So first, we are to enjoy His good gifts. Moses says, *“When you eat and are full...”* God wants us to enjoy the good world He has made for us. There is nothing unchristian about delighting in the good gifts God has given us. God doesn't want our joy to just stop at His gifts. He wants it to flow through the gifts to Him as the good Giver of the gifts.

Only then will our joy be fully maximized which leads to our second response: we are to express our gratitude to God for His goodness. Moses says, *“You will bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.”*

Both of these responses are so very important. If we rush past the enjoyment of God's gifts and don't really savor His goodness in the gifts, then our gratitude will be short-circuited.

We won't be as thankful as we should be. Instead, God wants us to slow down and receive and enjoy His goodness, to eat and be full, to be satisfied. It is out of this deep enjoyment of God's gifts that our hearts can sing the praises of our great God. However, if all we do is stop at the pleasure and don't chase it back to its Source—the God of all pleasure—we miss the very purpose of the pleasure. We become like the wife who finds a beautiful bouquet of flowers on her doorstep and only rejoices in the flowers, but fails to see and enjoy the goodness and love of her husband who sent her the flowers. You see, the flowers were never meant to be an end in and of themselves. The flowers are an expression of the love of her husband, thus can only be properly and fully enjoyed when they find their source in him and his love for her.

The same is true of our relationship with God. God has filled His world with pleasures so we are able to enjoy them, then in our enjoyment of them have our hearts overflow, welling up within us in praise and gratitude to God, the Giver and Source of all good things.

God's Warning

Well, we've looked at God's discipline in verses one through six. Then we've seen God's goodness in verses seven through ten. Now let's look at God's warning in verses 11-20:

¹¹ "Be careful that you don't forget the LORD your God by failing to keep his commands, ordinances, and statutes that I am giving you today. ¹² When you eat and are full, and build beautiful houses to live in, ¹³ and your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold multiply, and everything else you have increases, ¹⁴ be careful that your heart doesn't become proud and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

Moses warns the people that instead of responding in grateful worship and praise to God for His goodness, their hearts will be tempted to be proud and forget God. What does this pride and forgetfulness look like? Look at verse 17: *"You may say to yourself, 'My power and my ability have gained this wealth for me.'"* Here we see the sobering condition of the human heart. Despite God's lavish, gracious provision and care, our pride causes us to forget God and not really value Him or even see our need for Him.

Instead, we can become consumed with ourselves, so as God and His generosity fade from our minds, we begin to think more and more highly of ourselves. We start to think, "Look at what I have done. Look at how clever I have been. Look at how good I've been. Look at how hard I've worked. If other people worked as hard as I have, they would be successful too."

Sooner or later, slowly but surely, God is completely out of the picture. A sure sign that this arrogance has taken over is seen in your craving for affirmation and recognition from those around you. You want to be recognized for what you have done, but you get hurt and angry when people don't seem to value you as highly as you think you are worth. This is a dangerous road to go down.

Moses then warns in verses 19 and 20:

¹⁹ If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve them and bow in worship to them, I testify against you today that you will certainly perish. ²⁰ Like the nations the LORD is about to destroy before you, you will perish if you do not obey the LORD your God.

Failing to remember what God has taught them about their humble dependence on Him, instead responding to His gracious gifts with pride instead of praise, will not lead to life but to death. They will perish for their sins. What is Moses' solution to this problem? He urges them to remember the Lord their God. Look at verse 18: *"But remember that the Lord your God gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm his covenant he swore to your ancestors, as it is today."* Moses' point is that everything they are and everything they have is a gracious gift from God. I love what Colin Smith says: "Only God can say, 'I am Who I am.' What we must say is, 'By the grace of God, I am what I am.'"

There is not a moment of our existence that we do not owe to the grace of God and Moses wants to pound this point home. Look back at verses 15 and 16, noticing all God did for His people. In addition to powerfully and mightily rescuing them out of Egypt, Moses says:

¹⁵ God led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, a thirsty land where there was no water. God brought water out of the flint rock for you. ¹⁶ God fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your ancestors had not known, in order to humble and test you, so that in the end he might cause you to prosper.

What we must remember is that from start to finish, our lives are completely dependent on the grace of God. Were it not for the grace of God, we would all perish outside of the land of promise. Sin has done such a number on us that, left to ourselves, we would never humbly depend on God's Word; instead, we would doubt God's Word and fail to see His goodness. Our pride would cause us to forget God and boast in our own accomplishments. As Moses warned the people, that will inevitably lead to our death.

Even in preaching this sermon, Moses was not so naïve as to put his hope in the people's obedience. He knew the condition of the human heart all too well. No, Moses' hope for the people rested in God and His gracious intervention into our lives. That gracious intervention came in the person of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Like Israel, Jesus Christ too spent time in a wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). For 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus was without food. When He was at His weakest and most vulnerable point, Satan approached Him and invited Him to doubt His Father's love and care for Him. "If...if You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Jesus, it sure doesn't look like Your Father cares about You. You've been abandoned in the wilderness. Take matters into Your own hands. Satisfy Your own desires."

Jesus did not fall for that garbage. No matter how badly He wanted bread, He believed that submission to God's Word and humble trust in God's providence was more necessary than food itself. It didn't matter how hungry Jesus got, He was not ever, ever going to doubt God's love and care for Him. He was not ever going to believe that He wasn't God's Son and that God didn't love Him. He knew Who He was and He trusted His Father.

So Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8 and said to Satan, "*Man must not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*" This was how Jesus lived all of His life. In John 4:34, Jesus said, "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me.*" Jesus loved and obeyed God perfectly, so thus was deserving of life. Even though He had lived on every word that comes from the mouth of God, He willingly chose to lay down His life on behalf of His sinful, God-forgetting, arrogant people. But three days later, He took up His life again when He rose victorious over sin and death. Now He offers life to any who would turn from their sins and entrust themselves to Him. In Jesus we see the climax of God's gracious generosity. "*He did not spare His own Son, but offered Him up for us all*" (Romans 8:32). There was no greater gift that God could give than the gift of His Son.

So my invitation to all of us today is to look to Jesus and see in Him the goodness and love of God for us. If you are here today and have not trusted in Jesus, I want to encourage you to do so. Jesus is offering you life and inviting you to know the most wonderful, generous, gracious God you could possibly imagine.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

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