

**DEUTERONOMY
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

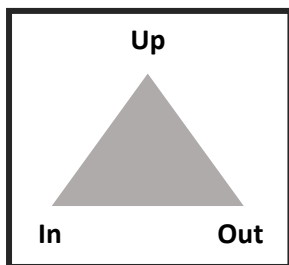
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament, we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY

We come to the book of Deuteronomy, the last book of the Pentateuch – the first five books in the Bible written by Moses. Deuteronomy displays Israel on the threshold of the Promised Land ready to adopt a true national identity. The name ‘Deuteronomy’ means ‘second law’; it was the second giving of the Mosaic Law, the first being at Mount Sinai. We need read and reread Scripture and remind our hearts of its truth. Oh, how quickly we forget!

Essentially, the book of Deuteronomy is a sermon, or a series of sermons, preached by Moses to Israel. One of these sermons recounts the forty years wandering in the wilderness, ending with an exhortation to observe the law given, known to us as ‘the Law of Moses’. Another sermon reminds the Israelites of the need to follow God and the teachings He has given. At the end of the book we have the song of Moses and the passing of leadership from Moses to Joshua, and then, finally, the death of Moses on Mount Nebo.

The key verse is found in chapter 30:19,20. *“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”*

Thank you again for journeying with me through these fabulous books. I hope and pray you are as enriched in reading these devotionals as I am in writing them.

So, gather your Bible, journal, and pencil, and pour your wee brew.

Let’s go! Love you all,

Phil

Read

Deuteronomy 1

Live

Forty years earlier God had rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. In the wilderness, the people made a covenant with their God – He would give them the land of Canaan and protect them, and in return they would keep His laws. Simple really. What could possibly go wrong! At last, Israel is just across the River Jordan from the promised land of Canaan. Moses has led the young nation out of Egypt on an ever so elongated journey, and they have just defeated several enemies before setting up camp here. Three of the twelve tribes have already settled in the land east of the Jordan, and the whole nation is almost ready to enter the land God promised to their ancestor Abraham.

The distance from Egypt to the Promised Land is approximately 380 miles as the crow flies. If you walked at 3 miles per hour (which isn't a fast pace) for 10 hours per day, you could do it in about 12 days. Unfortunately, a series of events culminated in a refusal of Israel to trust God and enter the promises of Yahweh, so they were sent back into the wilderness. The time allocated to their wanderings was one year for every day the spies were in the land. God reduced the life expectancy to *“three score years and ten”*, according to Psalm 90, known as the Psalm of Moses. This meant that anyone over forty years of age would die during these wanderings and then a new generation would inherit the Promised Land.

It is a stark warning even today that no one can play fast and loose with Almighty God. Even though we, thankfully, live under a new and much better covenant, we still have an awesome responsibility to live for Him. How good it is today to read again this incredible Word of God that brings life and hope into the darkest situation. God most certainly is the Author and the Finisher of our faith, the One who began a good work in us all and will complete it.

Pray

Father, forgive me please for allowing busyness and life to rob my relationship with You. It's just not worth it, nothing that robs You from my life is. May this new book I venture into today remind me afresh of Your Calvary love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Here we see how even in their disobedience the children of Israel had the generous hand of the Lord upon them. They had food and water, shelter from the elements, and even shoes that didn't wear out. They had a cloud by day and fire by night which meant that the presence of the Lord Almighty was always there – for thirty-eight years, as verse 14 reminds us. The longsuffering of our God never ceases to amaze me.

God ordered the Israelites to travel on even though the people in Edom did not allow them to go through Seir (see Numbers 20:14-21). The people in Edom were afraid of the Israelites but God told the Israelites not to attack them or take their country. God had given that country to the family of Esau and He is always true to His word. Moses reminded the people that God had provided for them during their long journey; He had given everything they needed in the desert and they should not desire areas of country that they did not need. In Philippians 4:19 Paul reminds us believers that God will supply all our needs, not all our greeds! He will do that by means of the resources that Jesus provides.

As we read this incredible story of the children of Israel, my prayer is that God would grant us all the same intensity the prophets invested in searching out the promises of God's Word. Old Testament Scriptures come alive in profoundly new ways as we read and re-read them. As we look for types and shadows of Jesus, may God show us more of Him throughout the Bible. The realisation that the prophets were serving us when they spoke of His coming, His sufferings, and the glories that would follow ought to humble and gladden our hearts. Let's never cease giving thanks for those whom God has sent into our lives to preach the gospel to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pray

Father, I will ever praise and worship You for granting me both the knowledge of my need for You and a love for You. Apart from the new birth, I would forever be a prisoner to my old life. Bring even greater freedom to my heart and glory to Yourself. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Deuteronomy 3

Live

Moses continues to relay the story to this new generation telling them how they had defeated Og, king of Bashan. This was no small task. We see from verse 11 that Og was a big boy; his bed was nearly fourteen-foot-long. Bashan was a region that grew good crops, had large forests, and land for cattle. There were more than sixty towns with high walls and gates to protect them. The Israelites destroyed the towns and all the people who lived in them because the land was going to be good for them and their herds.

I have often wondered why God told the Israelites to destroy some people and things. I think it is because sometimes things can cause people to sin. Jesus told us to free ourselves from anything like that, using strong imagery like gouging out an eye or cutting off an offending body part (Matthew 5:27-30). We must do everything we can to avoid sin or it will destroy us. A sobering lesson today, I think!

I find it a little sad that in the last section of this chapter Moses refers to his own disobedience that stopped him from leading the people across the Jordan, instead training up Joshua to do so. I do love, though, how he writes in verse 26 the words of the Lord to him, *“That is enough; do not speak to Me anymore on this matter.”* It is almost like something your mum or dad would say to you; this was such a close relationship between the Lord and Moses.

There are some days when it’s good and important to remember that God calls us to offer thanks *in* and not *for* all circumstances. The gospel of the kingdom isn’t about magic thinking or make-believe living. In fact, the kingdom is the only place in the universe where we don’t have to pretend about anything; that’s one of the many reasons we love God and are eternally grateful to be called His child. May He strengthen, help, and uphold us with His righteous right hand and help us when we hear the condemning whispers of Satan louder than the consoling voice of Jesus!

Pray

Father, grant me fresh assurance that nothing can separate me from Your love. Jesus plus nothing is my righteousness. Period. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Deuteronomy 4

Live

I love what is mentioned at the opening of this chapter in connection with coming under the sound of the Word of God. The first obligation is suggested by the word “hear” in verse 1, or as the Authorised Bible says, “harken”. This doesn’t mean simply to hear; it comes from a word which involves hearing with discernment and following with action. Not only are you to hear, but you are also to “do” or “follow”. In the middle of verse 1, you find the word “do” emphasised. Down in verse 2, you find the word “keep”. The word “keep” describes guarding something which is very precious while the word “do” involves the idea of obedience. It is not just a matter of observing the Word in the sense of obedience; it is a matter of guarding the Word as something sacred. This is the Word of God, and we must guard it in order that we might obey it in its simplicity. This is the positive responsibility that rests upon us all as believers and we are warned to not add or subtract anything to or from it.

Oh, I love this stuff! What an outrageously generous God we have. This Scripture contrasts the beauty of God’s love with the ugliness of our stubbornness. We all need to be so thankful for God’s relentless commitment to bless the most unworthy, unbelieving, ungrateful people (which I often see when I look in a mirror). Truly, Jesus was the arrival of unbelievable, matchless grace. The cities of refuge remind us that He is our sure refuge, eternal and beautiful. That’s why the promise of God’s jealous love mentioned in verse 24 is so precious. This God we have is so pure and perfect in His love that His jealousy is non-controlling and ever releasing. He has proven Himself to be a God who is not only with us in Jesus, but a God who is so very much for us in Jesus. His love for us in the gospel isn’t just unconditional, it’s irrational, and all embracing!

Pray

Father, You’ve met every condition necessary to redeem me and restore creation. You give mercy without measure and grace without limit, love beyond imagining and peace surpassing understanding. In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

One of the most memorable passages for me in C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* comes in the first book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. When Peter, Susan, and Lucy first hear about Aslan, the lion lord of Narnia, they experience a thrill of fear. One of the children asks if Aslan is "safe". The answer is, "No, he's not safe, but he's good." With those words Lewis captures the heart of the passage you read today.

As God reveals His glory at Mount Sinai, His voice thunders the Ten Commandments and the top of the mountain is ablaze with fire. The response of the people is fear. But God is interested in creating a special kind of fear, fear that is afraid of evil and disobedience and respectfully desirous of doing good. The writer of Proverbs summarises it this way, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*" (1:7). Approaching God creates a variety of heart responses; often we experience a sense of gratitude and we should also have a sense of awe and respect. Sometimes I pause to consider the expanse of the galaxies and the majesty of creation. Then I think about the tragedy of sin and the brutality of the cross, the price to redeem us back. Knowing the government of the whole world rests on those shoulders fills me with a joy second only to knowing His shoulders fully bore the sin of the world, including mine.

As this day unfolds, may we gladly surrender to Jesus' reign of grace. He is the Wonderful Counsellor, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We look to Him for knowledge of great mysteries, but also for wisdom about handling fresh disappointments, old hurts, and unfulfilled longings. He is the good Shepherd who cares so tenderly for His wee lambs. To see Jesus is to see the Father and to know Jesus is to know the Father, our Everlasting Father. I love it!

Pray

Father, I could never call You, "Abba Father" if Jesus had not first cried, "*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.*" For His broad shoulders, big heart, and coming kingdom I give You honour and praise. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Deuteronomy 6

Live

These guys had been walking around in circles for the guts of forty years now, eating the same stuff, looking at the same old parched scenery. A land flowing with milk and honey must have sounded like heaven. Thoughts of greenery, a change of scenery, and some nice food must have crossed their minds as it does mine! However, these rich promises were conditionalized by some rules and regulations. It is important to note that while the love of God is totally unconditional (both then and now), the blessings of God are always conditional (both then and now).

Knowledge begins with the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7). Fear is not a bad thing. Fearing God goes hand-in-hand with heartfelt love, a fact that often slips our minds and hearts. What we need to fix in our minds as firmly as we can is that God loves us and wants us to love Him with all of our hearts. The Scriptures are the tool He has given us to keep our hearts alive. Someone once said, "The words of Scripture are to be logs in the fireplace of our hearts, feeding the flame of devotion." I love that. As we read the record of God's loving acts as recorded in Scripture, we are reminded that He is the God who saves us from our sin and provides abundantly for our needs. He definitely deserves our love in return. The heart-settling command, "*Do not be afraid*" accompanies our God, like bookends of grace. Ever since our first parents sinned, fear and hiding have been part and parcel of life, and let's face it, we have all helped to keep the family tradition alive. At times, fear has more power over our lives than His love; although we know we are clothed in His righteousness, we can still reach into our wardrobe for fig leaves. Sometimes our fear of man and trivial things becomes more real than our fear of God. Yet, even as we acknowledge this fear of God, we praise Him for His non-condemning gaze.

Pray

Father, though I often have many fears, I love that I can bring these to You with joy, for though Jesus was once a baby wrapped in cloths lying in a manger, now He is my Saviour enthroned in glory, ever interceding for me. Thank You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The title to this chapter in my Bible is quite startling, *'The Privilege of Holiness'*. I have to say it grabbed my attention immediately. While God is full of mercy, He is also full of justice and His protection upon His chosen nation was powerful. God is bigger than every enemy and He was going to make sure the weaknesses that could lure His people away were dealt with.

Our lesson today is that when God gives us the victory over sinful circumstances, we need to hold onto that victory in its entirety. God warned the Israelites not to show favour to their enemies or make a covenant with them. When God defeats the addiction, you'd better take total victory. Don't start again, saying, "It's only a little..." or "Just this once..." or "I'm really stressed at the moment." When God gives you deliverance from debt, don't sign up for a new credit card with the thought "Just in case." In any sinful situation, whatever your enemy is, don't give it a place again when God clears that enemy away. We can be like the one who has an unclean spirit cast out but leaves room for it to come back. Jesus referred to this in Luke 11:26 *"...the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."*

There are so many enemies against the promises of God in our society today. How we long for the day of no more cancer, no more dementia, no more heart disease, no more respiratory issues, no more Ebola and AIDS, no more disease of any kind, the day of perfect health. Thank God for the promise of a resurrection body that will never get sick, wear out or die. Thank God that our life in the new heaven and new earth will not include visits to A&E, nursing homes or funeral homes. May He bring on that day in His good time, but until then, I will pray for healing and salvation, thankful that Jesus' finished work has defeated the enemy totally and absolutely ... forever!

Pray

Father, though I'd love for You to answer all of my prayers on my timetable, I will trust and love You when You grant me sufficient grace instead of instant answers. Thank You for all Your goodness to me and the gifts You've given to me by grace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Verse 3 in today's chapter is one of the verses quoted by Jesus to the devil during His temptation in the wilderness. 'Today is an important message,' Moses tells the people. 'Make sure that you both remember and obey the Word, because that's going to be your secret to life and survival.' He also reminds them not to forget what has happened in the wilderness the past forty years: no feet blisters, clothes that didn't wear out. We would think those things trivial but they were evidence of God's provision.

We often think of the forty years in the wilderness as simply punishment for unbelief; certainly, it was for those who doubted and died in the desert, but its purpose was more than that. For this generation, the wilderness years were a test to show what was in their hearts, whether or not they would stay true to the Lord. This has immense practical application for us in the present day as well. You see, if you've been a Christian for a while, you know that there are times in your life when you feel helpless and lost, maybe even like you're wandering in circles. Have you considered that these times might be for the purpose of showing where you are in the Lord? That the reason for the times of wilderness wandering is to see how you'll respond? The true nature of relationships is always revealed during tough times. When tough times come, some people are shown to be strong, others proven to be shallow. There are people who say they love you but bail out at the first sign of trouble, others stay with you through thick and thin.

It is important to realise that our relationship with God is proven during tough times. While many people give up on Him during difficulties, I for one want to be someone who sings "You are my Rock in times of trouble" and fully means it. Truly, trying times are tests that show our true heart. Our real feelings for God are revealed in adversity.

Pray

Father, help me today to adhere to You and to never abandon You. Help me today to be like the disciples of old when asked by Jesus "Will you run away also?" Their reply rings in me today, "Where would I go, You alone have the words of life." In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Deuteronomy 9

Live

I love this chapter as God calls these people forward with no cushy promises. God commanded them to do something that was beyond their ability to do in themselves. Obviously, God did not inspire Israel with a false sense of confidence or hype. He wanted them to realistically know what the battle ahead would be like. He says, 'These people are greater and more powerful than you.' Actually, in reading the first two verses, one would feel like doing an about turn and running! But Israel had done that forty years ago and it didn't pay well for them. In the same way, Jesus never calls us with hype or false promises that would lead to false confidence. He plainly says in Matthew 16:24, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."* Jesus let us know right from the beginning that following Him would require giving God everything.

I love verse 3, *"But recognise today that the Lord your God is the one who will cross over ahead of you..."* This verse is crammed full of holy mystery and immeasurable grace. The very God who created and sustains all things, who feeds birds and clothes the fields demands our following after Him, promising that He will lead the way. For most of us, it is easier to talk than to listen, to stay busy than to relax, to be 'productive' than to be meditative. We need to confess this as sin, for knowing about God isn't the same as knowing Him intimately. An informed mind is not the same thing as an enflamed heart. Today we can see how the stubbornness of the children of Israel's hearts angered a holy God. Moses relates to them the folly of the golden calf incident when the people turned to themselves instead of to God.

One of the reasons I love this passage is because it shows the power of intercession. Oh, the confidence of Moses when he reminds these people that when he prayed, God listened to him. Now that is pretty encouraging!

Pray

Father, may the gospel slow me, settle me, and centre me that I might exclaim with Paul, *"To live is Christ, and to die is gain ... indeed, I consider all things as rubbish compared to the surpassing excellency of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Deuteronomy 10

Live

Because of the sheer rebellion and disobedience of the people, Moses was so angry and frustrated that he broke the tablets of the law. I find it amazing that God wasn't angry with him for doing this. Actually, it isn't really mentioned other than God saying, *"Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to Me on the mountain."* Maybe the broken tablets reflected the fact that these people had brutally broken the whole law of worshipping God alone.

God said, *"I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets."* It would seem that God wanted His written Word to be the starting point for Israel's right walk with Him. I love that God restored the tablets, even writing the second set with His own hand. This is a powerful picture of the inspiration of God's Word. Though God did not literally write the Scriptures with His own hand, He did perfectly guide the minds and hands of the writers, so that the Scriptures are *"God-breathed"*, according to 2 Timothy 3:16. They are given by the inspiration of God.

I love this next bit. God said, *"...then put the tablets in the ark which I had made."* Getting right with God after a time of rebellion must *always* centre on God's Word. In the Scriptures, repentance and revival came to the people of God when they focused on God's Word again. So it is with us. Oh, the peace we have from knowing God is presently at work in all things for His glory and for our good – in the obvious and when we are oblivious; in our laughter and in our tears; when there is a fire in our belly and we feel we could take on the world, and when we're tempted to say with John the Baptist, *"Are You the Messiah, or should we be looking for another?"* There is no other Messiah, Saviour, or Lord but Jesus, and absolutely nothing will separate us from His love, for we've been called according to the Father's purpose which will never fail or falter.

Pray

Father, I love that You foreknew me and set Your affection upon me before the world began, and that You will continue to provide everything necessary to complete the work of the kingdom in my life. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

God commanded Israel to love Him which wasn't a big ask really, in light of all He had done for them. (Oh dear, I just felt the need to go and look in the mirror and say that last statement to myself!) We all know that love is not a matter left up entirely to our feelings. Love is a decision. When all the mushy, emotional bits subside, we make a conscious choice to love. This is true also for our love for God. Even when things are tough and we don't understand Him, we must always choose to love and trust Him.

It is important to note that what God really wants from us is our love. We could give Him a hundred other things, but none of it really matters unless we give Him our love. As Jesus said to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4, *"Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love."* They were the 'lights, camera, action!' church of their day but they had lost their vital connection. Their jugular artery was cut and they were bleeding to death (sorry if that sounds too graphic, but it's true). If we lose love, we lose everything.

Love for God never goes against His Word. Some people think their so-called love for Jesus allows them to disregard His commands, but this isn't real love. As Jesus said in John 14:15, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* Real love for Jesus always translates into obedience. Today, let's be especially moved to worship Jesus for being the Shepherd-Saviour that He is. Jesus, having laid down His life as the Lamb of God, has risen and is now the Seated-Shepherd, sat down at the right hand of the Father, relentlessly caring, vigilantly protecting, and faithfully providing for us. He never sleeps or slumbers because He is always interceding for us. "Good" Shepherd seems a profoundly understated title for Him, don't you agree? Because of His great love for us, we lack nothing. We don't get all our wants, but we do have everything we need for life and godliness.

Pray

Father, I praise You that it's to green pastures and quiet waters You are leading me, all for the restoring of my often tired, broken, and rebellious soul. I love You and I love Your Word. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Before anyone can worship God, there must be some places they will no longer worship. Let me explain. The practice in the ancient world, always short on buildings, was to take a nice building such as a temple previously used to worship a god, and make it a place to worship one's own god. God wanted none of that in His own worship; He commanded that the places of pagan worship be completely destroyed. Worship was not left to the opinion or whim of the individual Israelite; they had to worship God at His prescribed place among other worshippers of God.

What an amazing lesson we find in this. Worship is not a 'do as you please' or 'lone ranger' activity. God is not going to be satisfied with some second-hand, worn-out type of worship. No, there is a place where He wants you to worship. He has not called you to follow Him in isolation. I love this verse, *"Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* Hebrews 10:25.

Years ago, when I went to visit my mum who lived in the country, she would say, "Son, take that wee note and go and get me my messages." I would say, "Mum, I'm fifty! And I'm going to get my mum's messages!" I secretly loved it, though. When it comes to worship, you can't send someone else to get your 'messages'. You can only do that yourself. God, for His glory and for our good, guides us along paths of righteousness and goodness, truth and grace. And even as that journey involves traversing places marked by decay and death, He is with us and that's all we really need to know. We don't have to be afraid of anything or anyone. When enemies are close by and threatening, God is even closer. The nearer we live to Him, the stronger the fragrance we emit of His goodness and love. Even in the new heaven and new earth, Jesus will be my Shepherd, leading me to springs of living water. I love this truth!

Pray

Father, You are from everlasting to everlasting. Your greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. I will always live securely, for You are my peace, both now and forever. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Moses had warned against the perversions and diversions that could arise from the Canaanites. Here, he cautions against the rise of idolatry among themselves. We can expect to be proved by temptations of evil under the appearance of good, of error in the guise of truth; this is why it is good for us to be well acquainted with the truths of the Bible. There are huge dangers of wolves appearing disguised as sheep. Nothing exposes these types of temptation but the plain, raw truth of God's Word. The enemy is so subtle that oftentimes our greatest enemy comes not from without but from within.

True worship highlighted the problem and seduction of idolatry, raising it to the fore. There was zero tolerance for it. From verse 12, we see the prescribed response to idolatry. If idolatry was reported in a town and proven to be true, the town was to be totally destroyed. All the inhabitants, including the animals, were to be put to death and no plunder was allowed to be taken. Then that town was to remain a ruin, never to be rebuilt in any shape or form.

Our loving heavenly Father has gone to great measures to redeem back what the enemy stole, building for Himself a people who will cry out and worship Him in Spirit and in truth. May we be such a people who love Him with all our heart, our soul, and our mind. I love how God has promised to redeem a people from every race, tribe, tongue, and people group to populate an eternal world of peace and joy. This will be a people in whom He will find great delight and over whom He will rejoice forever. The redemption story of the kingdom really is *that* big and *that* good. God uses the stars of the sky, sand on the seashore, and dust on the earth to describe the magnitude of His mercy.

Pray

Father, I live with the blessed assurance that all of my sins have been wiped away and the glorious hope that all of my tears, likewise, will one day be wiped away. Until that day, free me to engage in Your commitment to make all things new – here, where You have placed me, and wherever You might send me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

These people were God's special nation and because of that, they ought to look after their bodies. They should not imitate what other nations did in their religions. God did not want the Israelites to cut their bodies as the pagans did. He had made people in the image of Himself and He asks them not to spoil that image. They were not to concern themselves once someone died as if they could do anything to make a difference. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 Paul says the Christian's body is the place where the Holy Spirit lives, *"Therefore, give honour to God with your body."*

In Mark 7:15 Jesus said, *"Nothing that goes into a man from outside will make him not clean. What comes out of a man makes him not clean."* God had forbidden Israel to eat animals that thrived off the blood of other animals, scavengers that lived off other dead animals; these were unclean. I find the food laws in the Old Testament pretty intriguing. I love how God is interested in everything about us – our homes, our finances, our habits and foods, as well as our spiritual well-being.

Moses finishes the chapter with the whole idea of giving first-fruits to God. I love how the Old Testament (like the New) supports caring for the underdog. Every third year they were to give the tithe to the poor. It is just beautiful. Everything God has promised with regard to Jesus will come to pass, including the redeeming of Jesus' bride from every nation, tribe, people, and language, and the renewal of this broken world into the new heaven and new earth. This also includes His plans for each of His children, both rich and poor. Even though national laws protected the rights of the poor, God was making sure these people knew that looking after the poor was to be part of their lives. I love this because it stopped the nation from slipping into oppression and poverty. God's ways are always the best ways.

Pray

Father, one day I will never be selfish or petty again. I will never get my feelings hurt or insist on being right. I will think of others more highly and more often than myself. I won't keep a record of wrongs, and will only, and forever, be an encourager. I will be free. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In Israel, money was loaned with the understanding that every seventh year, debts would be cancelled. It was a pretty amazing system which made sure there was no long-term debt. Money could never be borrowed or owed for more than six years. I love how it says, *"It is the Lord's release"*. This was an important matter to God. As Israel obeyed this command, there would never be a permanent lower-class people in the nation. Some might go through a bad period but would have the opportunity to rebuild their lives financially. God established an economic system wherein no one *had* to be chronically poor. Pretty cool system, I think! The same applied for slaves; in the seventh year they had to be set free. I love that the owners couldn't even send the slaves away empty-handed but rather with a generous gift. God reminded Israel that they were once slaves in Egypt and He came and set them free.

If people would obey the Lord, He would bless them as a nation and the natural result of their obedience was that they would not be poor. As I read this, I think, truly, there's only one government and one peace sufficient to meet the needs of our sinful hearts and broken world. God is already installed as the ruler of kings on earth and of everything else. No earthly system could match this. God's throne is one of grace and mercy, from which He is actively ruling the world with His boundless truth and grace. Indeed, God is zealously working all things together after the counsel of His good will and is working in all things for His glory and for our good. No one and nothing can derail, deter or distract God from bringing to completion His spectacular work of redemption and restoration. No earthly wisdom or demonic force can stop the King of kings. While He doesn't promise to do all things easy, He most definitely does all things well.

Pray

Father, forgive me when I get impatient with Your timing, don't enjoy all Your providences, and second-guess Your involvement. I've lived long enough to know You do some of Your best work when I am actually feeling the absence of Your presence. Give me more joy than I've ever had before in loving and serving people. In Your strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Oh, there is so much I could write about this amazing chapter. It records the journey of all male Israelites three times a year to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate three major festivals: the Festival of Harvest, the Festival of Shelters, and the Festival of Passover. At the first Passover, each family in Israel sacrificed the Passover lamb at their home, but when Israel came into the Promised Land, the sacrifice was to be made at the tabernacle, and then later, at the temple. Exodus 12 describes the first Passover when God sent His judgment upon the firstborn of Egypt and Israel was delivered from slavery. God passed over the homes that obediently sacrificed the Passover lamb and applied its blood to the doorposts.

Prophetically, the Feast of Passover presents Jesus as our Passover lamb. He is, as 1 Corinthians 5:7 tells us, *“the Lamb of God who was sacrificed”*, whose blood was received and applied so the wrath of God would pass over us. Beautiful! With the gift of Jesus, God remembered all the promises He had made to Abraham and his descendants, which includes you and me. I’m humbled, overwhelmed, and mesmerised at what God promised Abraham, making of him a nation for great blessing. Israel became the ‘national womb’ for the Messiah, through whom God is redeeming a family from every race, tribe, tongue, and group. No one can fulfil these promises but God. Abraham, and now Moses, could not have begun to imagine how all of this would play out. The promises God made to them all find their fulfilment in Jesus. Let’s praise God for His memory and His mercy.

It is interesting to note that at none of these festivals could people turn up empty handed. Let’s bring a gift of worship to the throne of grace today to thank God for remembering His promise to complete His good work in us.

Pray

Father, I am so ready to live in a world of no more brokenness, sin, and death; no more mourning, crying, and pain; no more fractured relationships and unfulfilled longings; no more ‘not yet’ and ‘not enough’; no more tensions, conflicts, and stress. Until that day, thank You for being the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The story is told of a little boy on his way to church with two fifty-pence pieces gripped tightly in his hand. One was for himself and the other was for the offering plate to give to God. On the way, he stumbled and fell and dropped both coins; one rolled into a drain, disappearing forever. He picked up the coin that was left and was heard to say, "Awe no, God, there goes Your fifty pence!" Funny as it is, there is a sting of truth in it for all of us, giving leftovers instead of first fruits. There is no bluffing God and He most certainly does not recognise the giving of cast-off, worthless items as a true sacrifice unto Him. We have a tendency to give God second best, if not third or fourth best, or even the leftovers, but God will not receive such a sacrifice.

Israel did not always live up to this standard of giving God the best, as the prophet Malachi reminds us in chapter 1 verse 8, "*And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably?*" King David also powerfully illustrated the heart of giving unto God when he refused to accept the threshing floor of Araunah as a gift, a place he was going to give to the Lord for building the temple. David said in 2 Samuel 24:24, "*... nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing.*" David understood that if it didn't cost something, it wasn't a sacrifice.

What can you do as a sacrifice to the Lord today? the words of Romans 12 are ringing in my ears as I read this chapter in Deuteronomy, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*"

Pray

Father, thank You for the price that You paid. Heaven's richest and best prize became the price for my redemption. Forgive me please when I offer You less than my very best in any area of my life. Love so amazing, so divine demands my life, my soul, my all. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Deuteronomy 18

Live

The Bible is full of calls to holy living, a setting apart for God, or, as the New Testament refers to, sanctification. Today we get the challenge to not just mirror-image the land we are about to move into, but rather go and set a new standard of holiness unto the Lord. The Levites and priests acted much like a modern-day minister or pastor; their job was to teach the people, set an example of a holy life, care for the flock, and handle the sacrifices and offerings (maybe a little more intense than modern-day pastoring!).

Witchcraft and occult practices were a massive no-no; the problem was these people of God were seeing these evil practices in the people of the land, and, unbelievably, they were sliding towards them. These practices lead people away from trusting in God and encourage them to put trust in what God created. Isn't that Satan's goal, to replace confidence in God with a dependence on something else? The Bible clearly forbids us participating in such things, which includes reading your horoscope and studying your star sign. This is an occult art, meaning that it involves "*knowledge of hidden things*", seeking spiritual knowledge apart from God's revelation. The devil comes to steal, kill, and destroy but Jesus comes to give life and give it in utter abundance (John 10:10).

How subtle the enemy is; he knows the spiritual void inside of people and he tries so hard to fill it. God and God alone can fill that void. We were made for Him and will only be perfected by Him. I am reminded today of the words of an old hymn by Stuart Townsend, *'In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song / This Cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm. / What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease! / My Comforter, my all in all, here in the love of Christ I stand.'*

Pray

Father, this is great comfort, to know that every blessing is bound up in Christ and in Him alone. Forgive me for the times I've strayed, even if only in my mind to look at or entertain anything other than You. May I look to You, You alone. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

God has such a concern for justice in this now broken and fallen world. He thought of everything, of course, He is God after all. God instructed Israel to divide the land into three districts and then build three cities of refuge, one in each district so they were easily accessed by everyone. The people of Israel were to make good roads to each city of refuge. Because the law demanded an eye for an eye, it meant that if someone killed another person by accident, they could flee to such a city and their avenger could not harm them while there.

There is a beautiful type and shadow in this. Cities of refuge give us a splendid picture of Jesus. The Bible applies this picture of the city of refuge to the believer finding refuge in God. Psalm 46:1 *“God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.”* More than fifteen other times the Psalms speak of God as our refuge. One of my favourite verses, one that God used to deliver me from fear as a boy is Hebrews 6:18 *“That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.”*

Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *within easy reach* of the needy person. The places of refuge were of no use unless the person could get to them. I love this beautiful picture of Jesus as my great refuge. In Jesus, we see a compassionate Shepherd gathering and carrying His little lambs in His arms. This image and hope are both settling and liberating. To be tended as a helpless lamb, to be held close to God’s heart, to be gently led, what more could one possibly desire? These aren’t mere metaphors. Metaphors cannot save or redeem us. Jesus really is this involved in our lives and He really is this grace-full.

Pray

Father, there is only one true King, and He is Jesus. The coming of Jesus puts us, Your people, face down in adoring love. Today show me, yet again, how Jesus is a most wonderful, merciful Saviour, Immanuel, the God who is very much with me and so very much for me. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Israel was a small nation surrounded by great empires; even now it is rarely seen in a strategically superior position. When in battle, Israel usually saw horses, chariots, and armies that outnumbered them by a long stretch. When you study each of the surrounding enemies mentioned in this chapter, you begin to see things God wants to bring out of us as we grow into mature Christians. Look at the different characteristics of these enemies; do they reflect anything in you? Hittites: terror, fear, the breaking down of others. Girgashites: constantly building on their own ideas. Amorites: boasting of one's self, to challenge, to speak against. Canaanites: to peddle, to trade, and to gossip. Perizzites: to dwell in the open country, no walled cities, don't fence me in with rules or regulations. Hivites: to declare, to show, I can make a life within self and have no need of God. Jebusites: to trample, pollute, walk over God's divine will and purpose, and loathe what He has given.

Despite the clear danger, the children of Israel had a clear command from God to not fear what any logical military man would fear: superior numbers, superior technology, and superior equipment. They were also given a reason not to fear: while God did not deny that many of the enemies of Israel would have more horses, chariots, and people, He asked them to recognise a greater fact, that *He* was on their side. As Paul said in Romans 8:31, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* One plus God makes an unbeatable majority. We can rejoice with the psalmist who declared in Psalm 91, *"A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you."* When God is on our side, we have nothing to fear. One day His glory will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. That will be a day when we will finally and fully love others as God loves us. What a glorious day it is going to be.

Pray

Father, until that day of earth-covering glory, keep me groaning and growing in grace. Grant me quick repentances when I love poorly. May the world recognise me as Your disciple by the way I love others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Having lived all my life in Northern Ireland that has seen its fair share of murder and loss, I found this chapter quite daunting. We read that if someone got away with murder, the community was held responsible. God had certain laws for cleansing and atoning that community. They took a young cow that was never yoked, broke its neck in an unploughed valley, pronounced a blessing, then the elders said a prayer and washed their hands, renouncing the curse. Unbelievable stuff! This chapter also outlines the laws regarding taking a wife from conquered peoples, the protection of inheritance rights, and the penalty for a rebellious son.

The chapter concludes with the curse upon one who hangs on a tree. Paul expounds verse 23 in Galatians 3:13,14, *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”* Jesus took our place as the accursed of God, being hung on a tree in open shame and total humiliation. He received this curse which He didn’t deserve for us who did deserve it. He did it so we could receive the blessing of Abraham which He deserved and we didn’t, to bless us not because of who we are or what we have done, but because of what He has done on our behalf. Absolutely, incredibly amazing.

Let’s give thanks to God today that we are redeemed from the curse of the law by the work of Jesus on the cross. We no longer have to fear the curse of sin and death because Jesus paid the price in full, and all of Abraham’s blessings are ours in Christ. He is a compassionate God full of tender mercies and love. I love the way Jesus loves us. I love the fountain of pleasures He has bestowed on us. He, whose laughter fills heaven, whose joy is our strength, He became the Man of suffering and sorrows just for us.

Pray

Lord Jesus, in taking up Your cross, You took up my infirmities and carried my sorrows, You bore my guilt and exhausted my judgment once and for all. What a wonderful, merciful Saviour You are. In Your strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

What a chapter, what an eye to detail, but then what a God we serve! God condemned the sin of doing *nothing*. To see your brother in need and to do nothing was to do evil. There are also health and safety laws in this chapter, like putting a railing around the edge of a flat roof in case someone might fall off. Then there are the clothing laws and the call for sexual purity. The Bible has much to say on sexual purity in both the Old and New Testament, far more than any of us might imagine. The Apostle Paul picks up this issue in Colossians 3:5-8 because he realised that nothing could wreck the church as quickly as immoral behaviour.

In Old Testament times, men and women wore clothing that was quite similar, long robes were common for both sexes. Yet, the specific types of garments and the way they were worn made a clear distinction between the sexes; the command in this chapter instructs God's people to respect those distinctions. Some have taken this to be the text against women wearing trousers or even, more ridiculously, men wearing a kilt. Some Christian groups command that women wear only dresses. However, this is not a command against women wearing a garment that may be common between men and women; it is a command against dressing in a manner which deliberately blurs the lines between the sexes. This does not prohibit a man from wearing a kilt; it prohibits a man from dressing like a woman, all too common and all too accepted in our modern culture. You can see here the clear retributions for immoral behaviour. We need to behave ourselves sexually as wrong practices cut us off from God's blessing.

We may need to repent of a few things today. Firstly, for hypocrisy, when we point the finger at the man and woman down the street living together, and yet we steal a lustful glance at another person's spouse. Secondly, for allowing our thought life to wander far into the realms of what is unacceptable by the standards of Holy Scripture. This really is serious stuff.

Pray

Father, purify my heart and let it be like gold. May my life, especially in sexual ways, be truly holy and acceptable to You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The seed of mankind seemed to be a big issue with God. It was pretty irrational behaviour to allow one's reproductive organs to be removed in an act of dedication to a thing or person. Most eunuchs were made so in pagan ceremonies where they were dedicated to pagan gods. That's why eunuchs were excluded, because God's covenant with Israel was vitally connected with the idea of the seed, and emasculation was a crime against the seed of man. It would seem to me, though, that these exclusions from the assembly of the Lord were not from the religious life but from the political life of Israel. It's good to know that under the New Covenant, none are excluded. God is not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance and live.

As you can clearly see in this chapter, sex was created as a holy thing to be enjoyed between a man and a woman who had covenanted together as one. God had to continually remind His people of their extramarital sexual behaviours, like the act of prostitution which (both then and now) makes a mockery of the sexual act, reducing it to a mere act of pleasure rather than an act of commitment and *agape* love.

As we read this passage today, we have to acknowledge once again how blessed we are by God's acceptance of us. Thank God that the gospel is all inclusive, no sin is too bad, no person unacceptable. We can worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit today with inexpressible delight. Jesus is our promised and much longed-for Christ, the Messiah. Every promise God has made finds its irrevocable YES in Him and Him alone. He is the solution for all our fears and the answer to all our hopes. We can bow before Him in joyful adoration, for He is the Lord of lords presently reigning over everything and working in all things for our good and for His glory. Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. I love this because it is Him who is setting them up and sitting them down at His sovereign discretion. God is on the throne today and forever!

Pray

Father, only Your Kingdom is unshakable and everlasting. Of the increase of Your government and peace there will be no end. I love that fact and I love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Many people and denominations hang their hat on passages such as this one rather than searching the Scriptures as a whole. It is sufficient to say that God reveres the marriage covenant with the highest respect. Even with due cause, divorce was never to be seen as a preferred or easy option. The Hebrew word translated “divorce” has the idea of “a hewing off, a cutting apart”. It is the amputation of that which is one flesh.

One of God’s ways of honouring and blessing the marriage covenant was to allow men who were newly married to be exempt from military or other state service for one year. We also see from the description of the role of the husband in Ephesians 5 how God emphasises the oneness between husband and wife. The husband cannot make his wife happy without also bringing happiness into his own life. Likewise, a wife cannot bring misery into the life of her spouse without affecting her own life. A happy wife is the foundation for a happy home; a bitter or contentious wife makes for a miserable home. Or, as a modern-day saying goes, ‘A happy wife, is a happy life!’

I love how God always has something to say about the poor. One little detail that caught me today was that if a neighbour borrowed something from you and gave his coat as security, you had to return his coat by nightfall whether you were repaid or not, because it might be cold when he lies down to sleep.

Join me in thanking God for loving the poor and for the sanctity of marriage. Marriage was God’s idea and yet we have soiled it by our selfishness. Think of how Jesus gave Himself for us. He didn’t consider His equality with God something to be protected or hoarded. Rather, He made Himself nothing, becoming one of us. And with measureless humility, He died in our place. One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. It’s going to be a loud and large day.

Pray

Father, on this day I humble myself in quietness and stillness, gratefulness and peace. Thank You for coming to me, Lord Jesus. Thank You for saving me from my sin. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Today we see how God considers some crimes wicked and the perpetrator deserves to receive the appropriate sentence, here, being flogged. Could it be that our justice system today considers itself better than God Himself? Yet we can't say that we live in a more just or safe society! The lessons to be learned are: let the offence be dealt with quickly, let the right punishment be set, and don't overdo it. I think these are pretty good disciplinary tactics to employ even in parenting (obviously I'm not suggesting flogging!).

Moses then talks about not muzzling an ox as it treads out corn. This law simply commanded the humane treatment of a working animal. In those days, grain would be broken away from the husk by having an ox walk on it repeatedly. It would be cruel to force the ox to walk on all the grain but muzzle him so he couldn't eat anything. In 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:8 Paul applied this principle to the person employed in the ministry of others, urging that they be supported by the people they minister to.

As I've studied this book, I have been in awe of a God who thinks of everything and leaves nothing undone, even the simple yet profound way God had of providing an inheritance for the widow. It makes me think today of those who lost loved ones recently and how God grants His grace upon grace for families still raw with loss and grief. No one is as compassionate as our God who brings His tenderness and nearness to bear in those left to grieve. Let's be thankful for Jesus coming into our world to defeat sin and death which He has so magnificently done. May He grant grace in complex scenarios and difficult stories. The world into which we were born is filled with madness and sadness and we can shy away from neither. I love also in this chapter the massive call to honesty in their weights and measures. Dishonest scales were detestable to the Lord. As it was then, so it is now.

Pray

Father, surprise us with Your healing, liberating presence. May endearing moments trump the moments that must be endured. Sweeten the bitter waters of our brokenness with the new wine of Your kindness. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The law of first fruits honoured the Lord because it gave the Lord His portion right off the top before anything was used for anyone else. There is no doubt that today the principle is the same. One of the themes of Scripture that I've studied over the years is covenant. It has been my hobby horse for decades. I love it. Theologians tell us there are hundreds of them in Scripture. God is a God of covenant. Scripture reminds us that from everlasting to everlasting He is God. That right there is an Everlasting Covenant in which about eight more big ones reside.

The cross is the ushering in of New Covenant. A great study is to look at what *stopped* at the cross, what *changed* at the cross, and what made its way *through* the cross right into the New Covenant. The old Mosaic food laws stopped at the cross. The way we can talk to God changed at the cross; now we are allowed to call Him "*Abba*". The Davidic worship made its way through, as did tithing. How can I be so sure about tithing? Because it was not just an Old Covenant principle. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek 400 years before the law was written and Jesus mentions it to the Pharisees as well.

This chapter is so encouraging and hope fuelling. As we give to God what is rightfully His, He promises never to be outdone. By Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, He has become the ultimate Peacemaker, and now He ever lives to preach peace to our hearts through the cross. We praise Him for being the sin-cancelling, enemy-defeating, relationship-restoring Saviour. First and foremost, we bless Him for securing us in a perfect relationship with God. Because of His finished work, we no longer live with fear and doubt over what God thinks about us. Not only do we now enjoy unbroken access to our Father, but we are also assured of His great delight and constant pursuit of us. Even when He must discipline us, our Father does so with a heart of love and restoration, not disgust or aggravation.

Pray

Father, there is no peace like peace with You. Help me today to give You the first fruits of my praise and worship that are due to You, with my heart and with my finances. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Deuteronomy 27

Live

Moses and the leaders give a charge to the people. There was nothing more to say, other than the simple encouragement to obey what God commanded. It wasn't enough for Israel to be hearers of the word; they must also be doers. Jesus reminds us of this in the Sermon on the Mount when He tells us the story of the wise and foolish man, *"He who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man that built his house on the rock."* And, of course, the contrary is also true; if we hear and don't obey, we are like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. We all need to be doers of the Word, not just hearers.

The first act when the Israelites crossed the Jordan was to imitate their forefathers in building an altar and renewing their covenant with God. I love this. Our strategy might have been more practical, like prepare for war and leave the duties of religion until victory was sealed. But Moses knew that no strategy of man could prosper without the covenant presence and blessing of God. What a great lesson for us all today. We should make God the beginning, the middle, and the end of everything we do.

While there were consequences for obedience, bringing the blessings of God, there were also consequences for disobedience. Moses gives the nation a pretty graphic list, to which they all said, "Amen". How grateful we should be that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. How grateful we should be that we no longer live under the law but are the children of a better covenant, called to the glorious liberty of the gospel, living in a kingdom where, when sin abounds, grace much more abounds. This is by no means a licence to sin and do as we please. May God preserve us and may we keep ourselves holy and set apart for Him.

Pray

Father, oh how I'm guilty of hearing and hearing and hearing yet not doing. Its sinful how deaf with overfamiliarity I become to Your Word. Forgive me. I want to become a doer, to be known as one who obeys You always. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The title in my Bible for this chapter is ‘Blessings for Obedience’. It is fitting that the chapter opens with the little word “*if*”! A small word with massive implications, a small word which looms large in this chapter as Moses presents the nation with choice. The covenant God made with Israel contained three major features: the law, sacrifice, and choice. God was determined to reveal Himself to the world through Israel. He wanted to do this by making them so blessed that the world would know only God could have blessed them, or by making them so cursed that only God could have cursed them and cause them to still survive. This choice was up to Israel.

Whether we like it or not, we still live in a world of choice. I know there are circumstances that come in life that are totally out of our control, but much of our destiny is a choice: which school to go to, which career to pursue, who to marry, to stay single, etc. Joshua’s statement in the 24th chapter of the book that bears his name is still very prevalent today, *“Then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*

I love that we have a Father in heaven who remains ever faithful even when we are faithless, One who gives us daily mercies and delights in us even when we try to find our delight in anything else but Him. God’s love is *agape* love which is inexhaustible, and it’s all wrapped up in what Jesus has done for us. It makes me want to cry “Abba, Father!” more often and with greater joy and confidence. We can be confident of His unfailing love because that love is not based on anything in us, but on everything in Jesus. In Christ, God cannot love me more, and He most certainly will never love me less.

Pray

Father, may Your love propel me into the stories of justice and righteousness You plan to write in our communities and cities. May I work and pray, serve and love all to Your glory. I choose You. May I follow You all my life. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

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Some forty years earlier, at Mount Sinai, Israel made a covenant with God. There was much in that covenant, but we could sum it up in two relatively brief statements: God made a promise to Israel that He would make them a nation through which all the nations of the earth could be blessed and know God. In return for this, Israel promised to follow, love, and obey God in order to receive the blessings.

We can be assured that God hadn't broken His side of the covenant; as for Israel, we can't say the same. Most of the people who had the blood of the covenant sprinkled upon them died in the wilderness. The generation of unbelief had died, now it was an opportunity for the new generation of faith; therefore, Moses reconfirms the covenant with the new generation. The covenant was made with the entire nation. This included leaders, men, women, children, and even servants. All of Israel was included in God's desire to enter into covenant, to have a people for Himself. He wasn't looking for a few prominent and talented people, or for only one spiritual tribe like the Levites; God wanted the whole nation to be His people.

Some things never change. It is not God's will that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance and live. The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Galatia, and in chapter 4 he says, "*When the time had fully come*". I love this verse. Thank God that Jesus came, not a day early and not a day late. As humbling as it was to be born under the ceiling of a stable, being born under the weight of the law was a far greater burden. Yet that's exactly why Jesus came into the world, to fulfil every demand of the law for us by His life of perfect obedience, and to exhaust its judgment against us by His death for us on the cross. He is our substitute, the One we trust as we journey home.

Pray

Father, because You lived and died in my place, I'm no longer a slave but a child of the living and loving God, with the full rights of privilege. I'm a partaker of a divine covenant built upon better promises than those of the Old Covenant. Thank You, Father. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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I love how God's longsuffering and mercy just kept embracing these people. From the height of blessing during the reigns of David and Solomon to the depth of cursing at the fall of Jerusalem, Israel's history has been a legacy of being either blessed or cursed under the terms of the Old Covenant. It is essential for us to understand that we, in Jesus Christ, do not relate to God on the terms of the Old Covenant but on the terms of a new and much better covenant, according to the book of Hebrews. Under the New Covenant, our relationship with God is based not on what we do for God, but on what Jesus has done on our behalf.

If the Old Covenant is inferior to the New Covenant, and if there was a high price to pay for rejecting the Old Covenant, then surely it makes sense that there is an even greater penalty for rejecting an even greater covenant. Hebrews 10:28-29 is worth a read, *"Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?"*

This chapter in Deuteronomy reminds us that only God is worthy of our heart's affection and allegiance. Because of what Jesus accomplished by His life, death, and resurrection, one day the entire earth will be covered with the knowledge of the glory of God. Every creature and all creation will be liberated for the praise of His glory and grace. What a glad day that will be when everything above the earth, on the earth, and under the earth will be healed and set free, for the enjoyment and worship of the triune God.

Pray

Father, in a coming day, no longer will I have to say, *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him"* for I will see, hear, and enjoy everything prepared for me. In light of that day, free me to live today with the humility of a person saved by grace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

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God's correction of Moses was hard. Not only will he not be the one to lead Israel into the Promised Land, he will not even get to enter it. That which he had dreamed of and felt called to as a child in the palaces of Egypt, to deliver God's people, will not be completed. Another person will finish the job. Moses' feet will never touch the soil of the land that God had promised to the covenant descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Why such a severe punishment? What did Moses do? Well, first of all, he was told to speak to the Rock, which is a type and shadow of Christ; it had already been struck once and, as Jesus was to be smitten once, it would stand eternal never to happen again. Moses was told to *speak* to the Rock, but in temper he struck it again and then gave a verbal download to the people. This represents the beginning of the downfall of Moses.

As soon as you start deviating from the plan of God, you begin to miss it and you fall into disobedience, and there is the root of Moses' problem. It would seem Moses' temper was a little thread we can trace from the casting down of the stones with the law written on them. Could it be he had forgotten the "I AM" who was in him? Perhaps he began to think, "I can make this happen." HUGE mistake of the church today. In this society it is all too common to wake up with all kinds of thoughts competing for our attention and energy. Our to-do list has more demands than there are hours in the day. That's what makes this chapter so precious, and timely. Life isn't about getting everything done, but knowing God, walking with God, and enjoying God. We won't add a day or hour to our lives by stress and worry. Far better to do a few things well as a person of peace and kindness than to rush through our list and run over people in the process. May we all remember, all day long, that the only thing that counts is hearing God and faith expressing itself in love.

Pray

Father, You are my portion, joy, peace, and inheritance. Help me to hear Your voice afresh today and not to act out of old habits, even the good ones. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

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Live

Moses has been my hero for five decades now. I've loved him from I was a boy. He was an incredible prophet and, in this chapter, he seems to take on the role of worship leader. After the sermons of the previous chapters, we now have a recital or song. Maybe Moses thought the people would remember these words better by singing them over and over, getting them into their psyche. This song was a witness against a rebellious Israel, yet Moses reminds them of God's goodness. This was to both bring a greater conviction of sin and remind them of the love and grace they could return to.

In forsaking God, Israel turned to the pagan idols of the nations around them and sacrificed to demons. There was a dark spiritual reality behind the idols of the nations, and Israel embraced that. When God's people forsake Him, He withdraws the intimacy of His presence. At first, this can sometimes seem a relief because the conviction of sin does not feel so great. But then darkness and desperation set in. When the hiding of His face does not draw God's people into repentance, God then sends His hand of correction to bring their attention back to Him. As it was then, so it is today; God is not mocked. The principle of sowing and reaping endures!

From beginning to end, God has always and only dealt with His people gracefully. By grace, God created us as His image-bearers for a life of intimacy with Him and engagement in this world. By grace, God raised us to newness of life in Jesus from a life of sin, rebellion, and death. By grace, He relates to us on a daily basis, steadfast in His love and faithful in His providence. Even when He disciplines us, He does so as a Father filled with compassion for His children. Let's praise, bless, and adore Him for all He has done. We stand as God's beloved children, fully forgiven and declared righteous in Christ, with a purpose to obey Him in all we think, speak, and do.

Pray

Father, thank You for giving me the power and everything else I need for a godly life. Thank You for calling me to Yourself by Your glory and goodness, and for making Yourself known to me. That's what I long for. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

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Live

This is one of my favourite verses in all the Bible: *“Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.”* Moses, the man of God, as he looked at Israel with a shepherd’s heart, could not leave them without blessing them. Moses could not leave this earth without a final blessing of the people he loved and served in the Lord his God for forty years. This chapter is similar to the blessing of Israel (Jacob) upon his twelve sons recorded in Genesis 49. Since Moses was the one who wrote Genesis 49, it is not a stretch to think he modelled his blessing on Jacob’s previous one.

I love how all the tribes receive a different blessing, reminding us today that no two of us are the same but we all have different giftings and talents. We need to remember that diversity doesn’t have to mean division. Actually, the opposite is true; there is nothing more diverse than a man and a woman and yet God has used them to come together to populate the earth to populate heaven. Interesting too that the tribe of Gad received the best of the new land because of their stance against the enemies of God. Let’s war on what God hates and never compromise our faith.

We need to praise God for being so kind, gentle, and patient with us. When we consider the difference between how much we know and how well we love, we are compelled to worship Him for how He loves us. I for one am glad that God doesn’t love us to the degree we love others; He loves us to the degree He has hidden our lives in Christ, which is completely. This good news is our peace, hope, and our joy. This is what we find as we study this incredible leader, Moses. What a man! So, as we reach for the garments of grace, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, let’s trust God for strength to extend to others the same loving-kindness He has poured so richly on us in Jesus.

Pray

Father, bring glory to Yourself as I bring my convicted and grateful heart to You. Help me to be like Moses who, even in disappointment, chooses to bless others around him. Help me to love as Jesus loves. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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This was God's sweet grace to Moses; though he could not set foot in the Promised Land, God allowed him to see it. Kalland writes, *"What drama! What pathos! What inward pain! What sense of accomplishment mixed with disappointment must have been in Moses' mind as he looked over the land the Lord had promised to Israel?"* I often think it was beautiful of God to allow Moses to come to the Mount of Transfiguration some 2,000 years later. I think the reason God chose Moses and Elijah was that both their deaths had some manhandling by God, and Luke 11 says they came to talk to Jesus about His approaching death. On Mount Nebo, looking out over the vast panorama on what must have been a crystal clear day, Moses saw the end result of his life's work, the children of Israel in the Promised Land, and he heard God say, as clearly as he had ever heard God speak, *"This is the land"*.

Could it be that God is showing you a new land to conquer in this season? I'm especially thankful today for the friends God has put into my life that I get to journey to the 'new land' with. The older I get, the more I treasure the tapestry of people He has woven into my life. And yet, as with other things precious in our lives, it's easy to fall into patterns of 'out of sight, out of mind' when it comes to the people we love. Even though we can't always sit face to face with them, we can always bring our friends to the throne of grace, like Moses often did for the people he led. May we be more faithful in remembering and praying for our friends. We really do need one another, not just for burden bearing but also for regular encouragement.

So, there you have it, the man Moses, a prophet like none other, according to Numbers 12:6-8. I wonder what his thoughts were as he said his final farewell and began his ascent of Mount Nebo, throwing himself finally into the arms of the God he had loved and served. I am definitely going to ask Moses about this!

Pray

Father, Moses' epitaph reads *"no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face"* (Exodus 33:11). Help this to be the desire of my heart, to know You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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