

## “Remember to Not Forget”

Deuteronomy 8:1-18

<sup>1</sup>“The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. <sup>2</sup>And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. <sup>3</sup>And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup>Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup>Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. <sup>6</sup>So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. <sup>7</sup>For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup>a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup>a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. <sup>10</sup>And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. <sup>11</sup>“Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, <sup>12</sup>lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup>and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup>then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, <sup>15</sup>who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, <sup>16</sup>who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. <sup>17</sup>Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ <sup>18</sup>You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (ESV)

There are very few things that I just dread in life. There are a lot of things I don't like and there are a lot of things that frustrate me. But there are things that I dread, and one of them is coming up this week. That thing that's coming up this week that I dread happens once a year, and that's my annual physical exam. The reason it happens to be this week is because they wouldn't let me reschedule it more than three times. Why do I hate the exam? It's not because I'm afraid of being sick, in fact I feel good. Look good – right? Why do I need to go? Yet I go because other people tell me I have to. But, the reason I don't like it is because the doctor is always probing. I'm forty-two years old now and it seems like every year he has more questions and more things he wants to know about me. You sit down and he pulls out my sheet and says first thing, “Well, the blood pressure is a little high – probably because you hate being here. Right?” Bingo. Check that. Then he goes down the list. “So, are you exercising?” [sighing sound] You can't lie to your doctor – I can't. So I failed that one. “How about your diet?” He asks and asks and asks. He asks all these questions. The other thing I have going for me is that I grew up on the beach in South Florida, and I'm practically an albino. So I have to be completely unclothed and he checks every inch of my body for sun damage.

What if the doctor came to me and said, “Tommy, tell me about your stress level.” Actually he never asks me that because he knows I'm a pastor, so let's assume. He asks me about my stress level and I say, “It's none of your business.” So he says, “Okay. Are you exercising?” “None of your business.” “How about diet?” “None of your business.” “How about your damage from the sun?” “Dude, none of your business.” Would you think I was crazy if I said that to him? You would.

Now, consider this: God Himself is the great physician of our souls. There are lots of areas in our lives where He asks us questions, or says, “Let me look at that.” What do we say to Him? “Psst. None of your business.” There is a primary thing he asks over and over, 2,500 times in the Bible He mentions it, yet more Christians than not when they're confronted with the issue say, “That's none of your business.” What's the issue? It's issues that revolve around money. God is the one who is the great physician of our souls and He's constantly diagnosing us and wants to see if there is anything He can help us with. Yet, oftentimes when you get to the issue of money, most Christians say, “That's none of your business.” The bottom line is, if you're a Christian, is there any part of your life that God is not allowed to ask about? Is there any part of your life that God's not allowed to probe? Is there any part that God's not allowed to examine and see if you need a little help there? The issue is, in my experience as a pastor and just from the witness of the Bible, that money is the primary issue that God tends to want to deal with our hearts about. The way we handle money, the way we're stewards of our wealth is one of the primary ways to diagnose whether or not you're actually growing in Christ. If the gospel is true, what it means is you've experienced the generosity of God and more and more and more you're becoming a generous person. So, Happy Mother's Day. We're going to be talking about giving today.

Actually we're going to be talking about stewardship for the next three weeks. There's another reason though why I want to talk about stewardship. Those of you who have been here for awhile know that every year I think that it's so important that I talk about giving because the Bible says so much about it. There's also another reason that is more specific, I think, to our church now that I've been senior pastor for almost a year. Now that I've been here, one thing that's always bothered me is

what I'm going to call the "elephant principle." When I was a kid my favorite animals at the zoo were elephants. I loved watching National Geographic specials about elephants. The only place that I can't stand seeing elephants is right in the middle of the room. In most churches, when you begin to talk about money or you begin to talk about the church budget, it's the elephant in the room. In my experience in our church, the church budget is the elephant in the room. Every year since I've been here, when it comes budget time all of a sudden everyone sort of changes. You have the bean counters who are constantly saying, "I don't know if we can afford it. We need to cut the budget." You have other people who say, "I think it's good, but do you guys even know what we're capable of giving?" Everyone sort of shuts down, and over the years our church has done a fabulous job with the process of coming up with a budget. What we've not done too well is developing an overall plan for stewardship and developing God's people as stewards. Until you begin to do that, every year at budget time it's going to be this time of, "I don't know. I don't know. Do you trust the guy? Let's ask questions." Only if you address the elephant in the room can you begin to actually address the real issues of what we should be doing with our money as a church. I'm going to mention it again. In your order of worship there is this stewardship survey. I asked the Session and they approved this. The only way that we can begin to answer questions honestly about our budget is if we get a little bit of information from you as a congregation. It's an anonymous survey. It will take you less than a minute to fill out, and I'm asking you to do it sometime during the service (if I hit a low spot in my preaching you can do it then). Do it by household not by individual and just put it in the offering plate as it goes by, or if you need to give it to one of the ushers on your way out, I ask you to do that as well. One of the questions we have to ask is, "What is our congregation capable of giving?" We can't make a good budget unless we know what it is we're dealing with – the raw materials, if you will. It's helpful. If you're willing to do this, the more data we have the more we'll be able to work with. If for some reason you don't want to fill it out, then don't, because I won't know anyway. But I'd encourage you to do it as we move into the stewardship mode we will let you know how the numbers come out on that.

This morning we're going to set the groundwork for this whole idea of stewardship. In a sense we're going to look at what is even the context of stewardship. We're going to do it from Deuteronomy chapter 8. We're going to look at three things this morning. We're going to look at one thing to remember and two things not to forget - one thing to remember and two warning or two dangers. What's the first thing when we talk about "one thing to remember," what are we talking about from the passage that I read to you? Really, it's the whole book of Deuteronomy. The word "Deuteronomy" means something like "the second law." The Book of Deuteronomy was written to the second generation of Israel because Moses didn't want them to repeat the same mistakes that their parents made. What they forgot was the Gospel and they forgot the context of generosity. What is the "context of generosity"? It's this thing that Christians call "The Gospel." What was the Gospel to Israel? It was that they were in bondage and slavery in Egypt and God came by His grace and delivered them from their bondage and slavery and made them a promise. "I'm not only going to take you out of your bondage and slavery but I promise I'm going to take you into the Promise Land, into the land of Canaan." For forty years they walked through the desert doing lap after lap because the generation that had been delivered out of Israel didn't really believe the second part of that promise. They didn't have faith. Since they didn't have faith and had unbelief, God just kept making them do laps. That's where the story picks up. Here the second generation now is getting ready to walk in and Moses wants to remind them to not repeat the mistakes of their fathers. Let me read to you a few verses from chapter 8 at the beginning. What's the context?

*<sup>1</sup>"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. <sup>2</sup>And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. <sup>3</sup>And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup>Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup>Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. (ESV)*

What Moses is reminding them of is not the Gospel in the sense of their deliverance from Egypt, but of God's on-going care in the midst of hard times. They got to the wilderness. If you asked anyone who made that wilderness experience, "What was it like? Was it pleasant?" To a person they would say, "No, it was miserable." The question is, "Well, did God take care of you during that time?" The answer is, "Yes." Even in the midst of hard times, even in the midst of trials and tribulations, the question you have to ask yourself is, "Is God still faithful?" In our context it might be this question, "In the midst of a down economy, in the midst of hard times, in the midst of a lot of fear about what's going to happen, is God still faithful in the midst of that? Will God still provide in the midst of that?" Look back in the history of this church or any church when times were hard and ask, "Was God with us that whole time? Did He take care of us?" In fact, when hard times come, at least in this text, the point of the hard times, it appears, is that God is actually testing Israel to see whether they will remain faithful to Him. Will they trust Him in the midst of hard times? Did you catch where it says, "I let them be hungry"? "I let them feel it. I let them feel a little bit of the toughness that I might feed them but also that they might know that man shouldn't live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God." In the Hebrew worldview when God speaks it is tantamount to action. When God promises you can count on that it's a fact. When He says that, "Man

should not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God” in some sense those go together. If God promises you He’s going to take care of you and He will never fail you or forsake you, you can count on that just as if it had already been done. So that’s what Moses is reminding the first generation of Israel: “Remember, God took care of you during that whole journey through the wilderness that he might test you.” He didn’t just talk about their journey, he reminds them of their past but he talks about their future as well. Let me read to you what their future will be like.

<sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, <sup>8</sup> a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, <sup>9</sup> a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. <sup>10</sup> And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. (ESV)

On one hand he reminds them of the past – that God took care of them in the past, but he also reminds them that God promises them abundance. The land that they’re going into, in other parts of the Bible it says it was like the land of Eden. Remember when the spies went in to check it out? It was like the land of Eden. It was so lush and so abundant that they will never experience lack in that land. They will have abundance. They will have more than they could ask or imagine. The Gospel to us is the same thing: Jesus delivers us from our bondage (it’s called sin). He promises He’ll never leave us or forsake us and He takes care of us the whole way. I preached on it a couple of weeks ago. Jesus promised that he will not only give you life, but give you life how? “I’ll give you life abundantly.” The promise from Jesus is that we would not just have life, but have abundant life.

The question is, “Does that mean physical or not? Is He promising us physical abundance or is He promising us something else?” The answer is pretty clear that it can’t only be physical abundance or material abundance because there are a lot of people in the world that trust Jesus where they’re dirt poor. So what does that mean for us? Fortunately for us, we can identify with this. When Jesus promises us life abundant that plays out spiritually and physically. If you live in North America you are experiencing abundant life materially speaking. There is no question about it.

Here is a web site if you want to have a little fun this afternoon. It’s called [globalrichlist.com](http://globalrichlist.com). It’s a pretty simple site. You go there and plug in your annual salary. You can do it in U.S. dollars, pounds, yen, whatever you like. Put it in and hit a button and then within seconds it pops out exactly where you stand with regard to the rest of the world. For example, Bill Gates is number one on that list. He is number one out of six billion plus people. I put in my salary, which everyone knows since I’m the pastor. I put it in and out of six billion plus people, I’m like the forty-first millionth richest person in the world. Forty-one million back sounds pretty far back until you consider the pool from which it’s coming – six billion. In fact, the average household income for the United States according to the 2007 census was just a few hundred over \$50,000 a year. If you put \$50,000 a year into [globalrichlist.com](http://globalrichlist.com) you know where you come out on that? You’re in the top one percent of all the people in the world as far as how wealthy you are. It’s something to think about, isn’t it? So when you’re as wealthy as we are, when you’re filthy rich like we are, what are the dangers of that? On one hand we tend to think of Israel’s time in the wilderness as their biggest test, their time of poverty and their time of not having anything as being this great test that they went through. The bigger test is the same test that’s just as big for you and me, and that test is not what you’re going to do with your poverty, but what you’re going to do with your wealth. Moses anticipated that, so he actually gave them two warnings about the issue of wealth. Let me look at the first warning.

<sup>11</sup> “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, <sup>12</sup> lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God . . . (ESV)

So what’s the first danger of prosperity? The first danger of prosperity is amnesia. You forget where it came from. If grace is true, that means that you and I deserve nothing and everything that we have at some level has been given to us. Yet, when we’re given great wealth and prosperity the great temptation is to forget God Himself. Why is that? If that’s the question, then another question is, “Was God really the thing you desired in the first place?” We all give effortlessly to the things that we call God. So if you want to know what your true gods are, just look at where you spend your money. Moses is warning them, “When you get in and you are full and you have no lack at all, your first temptation is going to be to forget the Lord your God.” What’s the remedy to that temptation? He immediately follows up with the remedy to the temptation or the problem of amnesia that’s due to prosperity and to wealth. What is the remedy to amnesia regarding God’s providence and His wealth? The remedy, of course, is the Gospel itself. The remedy is the generosity of God. If you have gotten to the point where you have what you need and because you have what you need you don’t even pray anymore, why bother? The remedy to that is to remember the generosity of God, and that is what Moses does. Notice what he says to them.

<sup>14</sup> then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, <sup>15</sup> who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground

*where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock,<sup>16</sup> who fed you in the wilderness with manna . . .*  
(ESV)

The remedy he gives is the Gospel. It's the generosity of God. You need to constantly remind yourself where it is you came from. If you are a Christian, do you remember what it was like before you were a Christian? Do you remember what it was like when you were lost and felt abandoned and felt orphaned? The remedy to this problem here is to remind yourself of that. But it's also to remind yourself of God's generosity. He says, "Remember the Lord your God who delivered you out of the land of Egypt."

Do you remember what it cost them to be redeemed out of the land of Egypt? It cost a lamb. During Passover, it cost every family a lamb. They had to slaughter a lamb, and to the average family that was pretty expensive. It was a big sacrifice to give a lamb. They would slaughter the lamb and put the blood over the door and the angel would come through and pass over those. That's nothing compared to the extravagant expense that God went to to deliver us from our Egypt. To deliver Israel from their Egypt it cost a lamb. To deliver us from our Egypt, from our sin it cost a lamb as well, but that Lamb of God was named Jesus. God spared no expense in order to deliver us. What Moses is saying is, "God spares no expense to deliver you." That ought to change the way you look at your wealth. The more you realize what it cost God to deliver you, the more open your hands will be when it comes to actually helping out other people. You notice I didn't say where we are in our church budget – we're down or we're up. I don't care about that. What matters right now is where you are with Jesus. If you are seeing Jesus for who He is, how could you help but be generous? There's another obstacle, and Moses points it out. The first danger of prosperity is amnesia. The second danger of prosperity is self-righteousness or presumption. Moses is anticipating that people are going to get in the land and they're going to have all this stuff and someone is going to come along and say, "You know, you remember God delivered us out of Egypt and he gave us all this stuff." What would be the response to that? It's the typical American response, by the way. I'll read it to you.

*<sup>17</sup> Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' <sup>18</sup> You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.* (ESV)

If you ever listen to the radio or watch the news you hear people complain. I'll be honest with you. I'm going to put something on the table. I cannot stand high taxes. When I turn something on I hear that someone wants more from me. It drives me crazy. But when you hear people talk about that what do you often hear? "I produced it. I made it with my own hands, therefore no one else should be able to have it." That might be true when it comes to the government. It is completely false when it comes to the Gospel because when you consider the Gospel you never have the right to say, "This is my stuff. I worked for it. I produced it, therefore no one can touch it." At that point Moses says, "Don't you know, Tommy? Even the power to earn that came from God? He didn't just give you this stuff, He gave you the power to earn this stuff. At the end of the day you are completely and utterly reliant on His grace. Do you understand that, Tommy?" Most of the time I say, "No."

But there is something bigger. Did you notice what he attaches to the end of this? He says, "Don't forget this in order that God may confirm to you the covenant He makes this day and that He made with your fathers." What's the covenant that God made with the fathers starting with Abraham? The covenant that God made with Abraham started in Genesis chapter 12. God called Abraham out and said, "I'm going to give you two things. I'm going to give you an heir, and a great people will come from you, Israel." And, "I'm going to give you land, the Promised Land." They're getting ready to walk into it. We always forget, what was their part of the bargain? What was Abraham's side of the bargain that God made with their fathers, namely Abraham? "I'm going to give you an heir, and I'm going to give you a land, and you on the other hand, your job in this covenant is to be a blessing to all the families in the earth. That's why I'm calling you. That's why I'm giving you all this stuff. That's why I'm giving you heirs. That's why I'm giving you the Promised Land. That is why I'm going to give your descendants the most abundant wealth the earth has ever known so that your descendants can be a blessing to all the families on the earth. That's why I'm giving it to you. Don't forget."

What does that have to do with us? Same thing. God has given us our wealth. First of all, do you realize that not only does He own everything, but He has given everything that we have so that we have that we might be a blessing to everyone around us? If your answer to that question is, "Yes" then that changes your life because then every single spending decision you make becomes a spiritual decision. It becomes a spiritual decision, "Should I spend this money on myself or should I give it to someone else who needs it more?" Mind you, I'm not talking about taxing you, I'm talking about, "Are you becoming a more and more generous person?" Think about that this week.

Next week we're going to start talking about the issue of tithing. Now, some of you I know are immediately thinking, "The New Testament says nothing about tithing." You're right. The New Testament says you're to give everything, so I'm going to cut you some slack by only talking about tithing. Think about that.