

## Week 1: Remember God is Near

### Call to Worship:

Sooner or later the heavenly vision comes to all men. It comes in the whisperings of conscience, in the strivings of the Spirit, in the calls of duty, in the moments of regret for an evil past, in moments of tenderness and sorrow, in the crises of life, in the entreaties of God's people. It comes in afflictions and losses, in the thunders of the law, in fearful, ominous threatenings of eternal judgment, in the death of loved ones, in crushed hopes, disappointed plans and thwarted ambitions. In all these things Jesus hides Himself as He hid Himself in the burning bush, which Moses saw on Horeb. If men would but turn aside and heed the vision as Moses did, a voice would speak and cause them to know the Lord, and if they would not be disobedient to the heavenly vision, Jesus would turn them back from the pit, and satisfy every questioning of their minds and every longing of their hearts.

From *Heart Talks on Holiness* by Commissioner Samuel Logan Brengle

### Songs

“When God Comes Near” SAHC #62

“Shout to the Lord” SASB #264

“We have Caught the Vision Splendid” SASB #938

“Indescribable” [https://youtu.be/htr4gl\\_AIRI?si=rkur9VtbBJTqxZ3D](https://youtu.be/htr4gl_AIRI?si=rkur9VtbBJTqxZ3D)

“How He Loves” [https://youtu.be/hjCpcZqns-U?si=4szLom3hTVec9sh\\_](https://youtu.be/hjCpcZqns-U?si=4szLom3hTVec9sh_)

“You Never Let Go” SAHC #185

### Scripture

Deuteronomy 4: 5-14

### Prayer

#### **Psalm 85:1-10 (NLT)**

I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying,  
for he speaks peace to his faithful people.  
But let them not return to their foolish ways.  
Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
so our land will be filled with his glory.  
Unfailing love and truth have met together.  
Righteousness and peace have kissed!

### Activity

*SUPPLIES: the Memory game by printing two copies of the cards on the last page on cardstock. Set up the cards face down in even rows on a table.*

Today we are going to play Memory. The key to this game is to remember what card you picked up and where it is located. The first person starts by turning over two cards. If the cards match, you get to keep them. If the cards do not match, turn them back over and it is the next person's turn.

When you make a match, you get to keep the cards you matched and take another turn. The person with the most cards at the end of the game is the winner. Are you ready?

*Play a round of the game. For larger groups (6 or more), enlist a helper and have 2 games going on at once or choose 4 volunteers to play. Engage those who cannot play by providing commentary.*

Great job! I bet some of you recognized some of the things on those memory cards. They come from the story of Moses. He led the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt over many years as they traveled from place to place in the wilderness on their way to the promised land. God led the way using a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. Along the way, they worshipped in a tent or tabernacle, and God gave them his laws. God also taught them many lessons about trusting in him for everything they needed. He provided manna and quail for the people to eat. He even made water come out of the rocks for them to drink.

Today we begin a new worship series based on the book of Deuteronomy. It is the fifth book of the Bible. It records the last speeches of Moses. The Bible tells us that Moses was a great leader, but he could not lead the people forever. Moses would not always be there to remind the people of all the things that God had done for them and all the lessons that they had learned. Soon Joshua would lead the people. Deuteronomy is like a game of memory for the people that Moses led. As he spoke to the people, he told them to remember.

This is a good lesson for us as well. It is important for us to never forget the good things that God has done for us. I want you to think of at least one good thing that God has done for you.

*If time allows, ask for a few people to share what God has done for them.*

Let's take a few minutes to pray and thank God for all his goodness.

### Sermon

I come from a family of story tellers. In my family, no one said, "Remember not to take yourself too seriously." Instead, we told the story of my aunt showing up for the family reunion missing a lens from her eyeglasses and happily declaring how good everyone looked. We learned about sacrificial love from stories of my grandfather walking to work (in the heat, rain, or snow) so that he could leave the car with my grandmother and the kids. He did so without complaint because it was more important for his wife and children to have a vehicle for groceries and errands than for that same vehicle to sit in the company lot all day. That same story also taught us a bit of our false pride since he never asked a friend or one of his two brothers who worked at the same plant for a ride to work. The stories we tell have meaning. If we listen carefully to the stories that people tell, we will begin to understand who they are, their values, their history, and where they want to end up.

Today, we begin a new sermon series on the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy records the last words of Moses to his people before they transition from wandering in the wilderness to conquering and eventually settling in the land that God has promised to them from the time of Abraham. In the book of Deuteronomy Moses asks the people to remember. He tells them stories

from their past to remind them who they are, what they came from, and most importantly the legacy which they should carry into the promised land and beyond.

**Moses wants the people to know that God is with them. He says in Deuteronomy 4:7 (NIV) “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?” God is close. God is listening. God is aware.**

The purpose of many ancient religious ceremonies was to get the attention of their gods. In 1 Kings 18 when the prophet Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal, he taunts them by saying “Shout louder! Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” In response to Elijah’s taunts, the prophets of Baal “shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears.” (1 Kings 18:27-28 NIV) This went on from the morning into the early evening hours with no response from Baal. In contrast, we read that Elijah stepped forward and prayed

“Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. <sup>37</sup> Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” (1 Kings 18: 36-37 NIV)

Because God was near, he heard and responded immediately to Elijah’s prayer by sending fire from heaven.

**Not only is God near, but God is responding. He’s doing something. He is involved with his creation.** The fact that the people serve a God who is near and who responds is what makes the people who Moses leads mighty. Not their military power, not their wealth, but the very fact that God is there both listening and helping. It is also what gives us strength.

As members of God’s Kingdom, his Holy nation, his Royal priesthood, what makes us great, what defines us is not our riches or influence. The only thing that makes us great is that God is with us. When we lose sight of the fact that our greatness comes from God’s interaction with us and nothing else then we will lose the very thing that ensures our victory, the thing that makes us great.

**Moses takes this one step further. He says that if it is God’s interaction with us that makes us great, then we ought to listen to and do what God commands.** He asks in Deuteronomy 4:8 (NIV2011) “And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?”

It’s one thing for God to come near, it’s another to listen to what God says when he comes near. A lot of times, we can be like Jonah, waiting for God to give us some important job to do and then when God says “Go,” we decide to head off in the opposite direction. In the same way, we can be guilty of singing and professing our love for God while ignoring God’s command to love our neighbor (especially if that neighbor is difficult). We can claim to serve the God of truth, while not being honest. We can suffer from a disconnect between what our faith says and what we do.

This is particularly important as we seek to pass on our faith to the next generation. The American researcher George Barna writes, “We have found that unless young children are taught how to tie their beliefs into their daily behavior, the chances of that faith ever influencing their lifestyle in significant ways is slim.”<sup>1</sup> For this reason Moses pleads in Deuteronomy 4:9 (NIV2011) “Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/faith-has-a-limited-effect-on-most-peoples-behavior/>

It is not just enough to say that God is near, and we can pray to him. We must live our lives in that faith every single day if we have any hope of living victoriously today and leaving a legacy of faith for the next generation.

When I was a teen, my mom was laid off from her job as a retail manager. When she could not find another job which used her skills and experience, she was forced to take a job at a fast-food restaurant just to pay the bills. She went from overseeing the day-to-day activities at a store with a staff under her to working at a taco stand. Her co-workers were mostly teens who were just a few years older than me and her new boss had much less experience managing and scheduling people than she had. It was only as I got older that I began to realize the desperation she must have felt to apply for such a job and the amount of pride she had to give up when she went to work there. I remember her coming home from her first day of work carrying a new employee binder. On the front cover she had written the letter "P" twice. When I asked about it, she explained that it meant "Prayer and Praise" because she knew that no matter what prayer and praise would bring her through the difficult times. I witnessed how each day she approached this new job with prayer and thanksgiving. She quickly became a second mom to many of the young people with whom she worked and a mentor to her younger and less experienced boss. I witnessed firsthand my mother's humility and grace in the face of a difficult circumstance.

Many of us have a legacy of faith - Much like the legacy of faith that my mother left me when she taught me through her words and example that prayer and praise would always bring me through the difficult times. The legacy which Moses wanted his people to remember was Horeb. He writes in Deuteronomy 4:10 (NIV) "*Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb.*" Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai. It is the place where God came down, shook the mountain, and gave Moses the 10 Commandments. It is a place where God felt very close.

Like the people to whom Moses spoke, we need to remember those times when God comes near. We need to remember when we felt God's presence in a real and tangible way. For some here it might be a while since you really felt God's presence, heard his voice speak to your heart, or felt the unmistakable move of Holy Spirit. Today, I want you to remember again that God is here. He is active. He is listening. He is the same God who shook the mountain and spoke. He is the God who led his people by a pillar of fire and cloud. He is the very same God who can shake our lives out of complacency. Today he is speaking to our hearts and longing to lead us in his ways.

#### Benediction in Song

"When I Remember that He Died for Me" SAHC #52

OR

Remember who you are.

You are of God.

Made in His image.

Loved from the depths of God's unfathomable Father's heart.

Treasured beyond imagination.

From *Forgiving What You Can't Forget* by Lysa Terkeurst

Egypt



10 Commandments



Moses



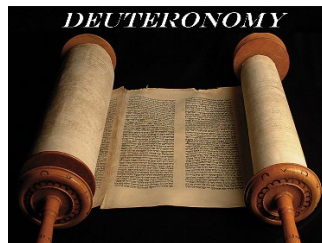
Wilderness



Sinai/Horeb



Deuteronomy



Joshua



Promised Land



Hebrew Slaves



Bible



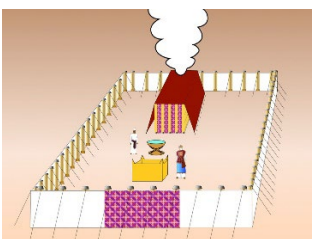
Pillar of Fire



Pillar of Cloud



Tabernacle



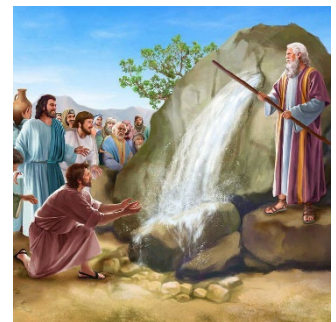
Manna



Quail



Water from Rocks



Staff



Burning Bush



Ark of the Covenant



Baby Moses



## **Week 2: Remember Bondage (Where You Were When God Rescued You)**

### Call to Worship

It was a dark and awesome night, filled with risk and fear. It began with a quiet gathering of all the slave families and then a panicky rush to the border with the Egyptian guards in hot pursuit. When the slaves reached the other side, they were free! Most thought they would never make it. And they got out their tambourines and danced.

Those same families...continued to the desolation of Sinai, where the Holy One of freedom met them again. You know that meeting where the ten commands of biblical faith emerged, [but] Biblical morality is not found in the Ten Commandments or any part of them but in the action of the Holy One.

Biblical morality is in a story rather than a set of rules. ...In the Bible it is a story cherished and remembered, a story about our faith family, little faith-cousins awakened in the night, faith-uncles and faith-aunts who crossed the water and danced in incredulity. Morality is based on the assurance that that story is our story, not simply remembered but a story we experience -- being awakened in the night, called to dangerous waters, and then to dance again.

Selection from Walter Brueggemann  
in *Living Toward a Vision*, pages 63-65

### Prayer Focus:

#### **Psalm 19:7-11 (NIV)**

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.  
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.  
The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.  
The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.  
The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.  
The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.  
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;  
They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.  
By them your servant is warned;  
In keeping them there is great reward.

### Songs:

“Come to Jesus” SAHC #179  
“Happy Song” <https://youtu.be/80ioT7LKYHc?si=smcHSAAj5Aok4nXO>  
“O Remember” SASB #446  
“Tell Me the Old, Old Story” SASB #150  
“When I Remember that He Died for Me” SAHC #52  
“Breath on Me” SASB #294

“Mighty To Save” SAHC #272

“Gratitude” <https://youtu.be/cD3xUCGPUnA?si=B-5bvgztH1sbODXu>

Scripture

Deuteronomy 5: 1-22

Activity:

*SUPPLIES: Memory cards from Week 1*

Last week we talked about how important it is to never forget the good things that God has done for us. I have our memory cards from the life of Moses.

*Go through a few of the cards to remind everyone of the events in Moses’s life.*

I am going to give you a few moments to study these cards and then I’m going to take one away and see if you can remember the card that is missing.

*After everyone has looked through the cards, take out the card with “10 Commandments” and shuffle the cards and put them back out again.*

Who thinks they know what card I left out? If you think you know the answer, raise your hand.

*Choose someone to reveal the answer to everyone.*

The answer was the “10 Commandments” card. God gave the people 10 rules to follow that would help them serve God and others. Can anyone name all 10 Commandments?

*If no one can name all 10, give them a few moments to try to recall as many as they possibly can.*

Moses wanted the people to remember the 10 Commandments. Today I would like to teach you a few hand motions that help me to remember.

#1 *[Hold 1 finger up]*

God said that there is only 1 God, and we should worship only him.

#2 *[Hold up 1 finger on each hand]*

Because there is only 1 God, we cannot make any other gods or idols.

#3 *[Hold 3 fingers in front of your mouth]*

We should never curse using God’s name or speak lies about God.

#4 *[Walk along using 4 fingers]*

Go to worship every week.

#5 *[Take 5 fingers of one hand and lightly spank or tap your other hand]*

Listen to your mom and dad.

#6 *[Hold up one hand. Using a finger from the other hand stab the first hand.]*

Do not murder

#7 *[Hold up 2 fingers on one hand and place your other hand between them.]*

Do not separate a husband and a wife.

#8 [Hold up 3 fingers on one hand and tightly grab them using your other hand.]

Do not steal

#9 [Place one hand flat down and hold up 4 fingers on the other hand.]

I promise not to lie.

#10 [Outspread both hands and face them toward each other.]

God has given to everyone equally. Do not be jealous of what others have.

It is important to remember the 10 Commandments because God designed them to help us live a life of faith. They help us to avoid sinful habits and behaviors which not only hurts our relationship with God, but with each other.

### Sermon Notes:

We rely on mnemonic devices or memory hooks to recall important things.

Perhaps you have heard or used a few of these memory hooks:

Mary's Violet Eyes Make Johny Stay Up Nights.

(The planets – Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune)

Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge and FACE

(The notes on the lines and spaces of a musical scale.)

Super Heros Must Eat Oats.

(The great lakes of North America – Superior, Huron, Michigan, Erie, and Ontario)

WWJD

(What Would Jesus Do?)

FROG

(Fully Relying on God)

There are other ways to help us remember things. Sometimes we learn scripture by singing it. Embarrassing fact about me: singing "The Bible Book Bop" by GoFish is the only way I can remember the books of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Technology helps us to remember. We set alarms to remind us to take medication or to get ready for an important appointment. If you are old fashioned, you might still write yourself notes on sticky paper and stick them around your home or office or the front of the refrigerator.

Because we have all struggled to remember something, we can probably appreciate the Israelites position, as they listened to Moses and tried to remember all this stuff, especially since they had no cellphones or notebooks -- remember the law, remember the covenant. Not so hard just yet. Then, right in the middle of reciting the 10 Commandments, Moses says, "*Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.*" (Deuteronomy 5:15 NIV) Wait a second, Moses! Slavery in Egypt

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<sup>1</sup> <https://youtu.be/nLLySvD76dA?si=H1K0fZHmvEqYz8Bv>

is something that we would rather forget. Like the pain of a broken arm or the last time we had a bad case of the flu, no one wants to remember being enslaved; however, remembering this event was pivotal to the people's spiritual survival and it has implication for our spiritual survival today.

The people of Israel were to "remember" that they were slaves, because God had done something wonderful for them. He had liberated them. Liberation from bondage was not something they had accomplished by their own efforts. It required God's intervention on their behalf. Moses was not merely reminding them of the horrible reality of their enslavement but also reminding them of the awesome miracle of God's redemption and transformation.

It's important to acknowledge that slavery is not merely physical. Being locked up makes someone a prisoner, but not necessarily a slave. Often people who are enslaved have very few physical restraints, but they cannot escape their situation because slavery is a whole set of social, emotional, and even spiritual constraints. Enslaved people are conditioned to believe that there is no way out of their situation and sometimes even that they deserve captivity.

When we look at the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, they were limited physically to the Pharaoh's brickyards, but worse yet, they were held captive emotionally and spiritually. Contrary to popular belief, the Hebrew slaves did not make the pyramids of Egypt. We read in Exodus 1:11, "*So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh.*" Only by looking at archeological evidence are we beginning to understand what the slaves were building in the Nile delta. The archeology suggests that the Egyptians were using the mudbricks the slaves made to build large warehouses for the temples of the Egyptian gods. According to the Biblical Archeology Society "In Egyptian temples, extensive storage capacities were necessary to provide for daily offerings and the numerous personnel."<sup>2</sup>

The dynamics at work here are obvious – people who have nothing, not even their freedom, are building cities of storage to contain the excesses of the gods of those who are persecuting and enslaving them. Day after day, those with nothing are working to contain the excesses of those who have everything. What keeps them in the brickyard is the belief that serving the needs of the powerful is the only way to survive.

Our predicament is very similar. The Bible describes people as "slaves to sin" (Romans 6:20). Sin places us in virtual brickyards of our own making. Like the Hebrew slaves, we find ourselves working to contain the excesses of that which holds us captive. We buy into the false narrative that constructing storehouses to contain our wealth, our addictions, our unhappiness, our insecurities, is the way to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-egypt/pharaohs-brick-makers/#:~:text=Exodus%201:11%20adds%20a,near%20ancient%20Avaris>

survive in this world, because truthfully, those things are more powerful than we are.

But those things are not more powerful than God. The story does not have to end in the brickyard, because God came down and declared, “I am the Lord” (Exodus 6:2). He has come to throw off our heavy load and to declare our freedom.

This is the heart of the Good News, but it comes at a great price. In the book of Exodus, we read that Pharaoh was hardhearted (Exodus 7:14). His people were subjected to 9 plagues of increasing severity: the Nile turned to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, the death of livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. None of it would soften the Pharaoh’s heart. It turned out that only a sacrifice would do. The angel of death passed over a sinful people demanding life and no one was exempt. The life of the firstborn was due to God, but the life of the lamb was offered in its place. It was only through this sacrifice that the Hebrew slaves would be freed.

The story of the Exodus is the Biblical model on which our story is based. The life of the lamb of God, Jesus Christ, is the price that was paid for our freedom. Because of our sin we are destined for death, but God’s great love for us opened the way to eternal life in heaven. We must never forget that God has rescued us. We must never forget that God himself paid the price of our redemption from the slavery and tyranny of sin. This is the very foundation upon which our identity as the people of God is built.

On June 18, 2023, the OceanGate Titan submersible disappeared while carrying 5 passengers to see the wreckage of the Titanic which lays over 3000 meters below the surface of the ocean. Just days later, what remained of the passengers and vessel was found on the ocean floor. Subsequent investigations discovered that what doomed the Titan was not some unforeseeable circumstance. What led to the catastrophic failure of the Titan’s hull and its subsequent implosion was the reckless disregard for basic engineering and safety protocols of OceanGate’s founder, Stockton Rush. In a push to be innovative and experimental, he had forgotten about passenger safety. He failed to remember the purpose of his company – transporting crews of people deep into the ocean.

As Moses prepared his people to march into the land that many future generations would occupy, his concern was not teaching the people a new way to live, but rather that they remembered how God had rescued them from their former way of life.

Similarly, as we look to the future, we will certainly face new challenges. We must embrace innovation and change; however, we will be crushed and wrecked like the Titan if we forget who we are in Christ. Remembering and celebrating our redemption is what holds us together despite the challenges ahead. I am reminded of the Apostle Paul’s words to the Corinthians, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are

hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair.”  
(2Corinthians 4:7-8)

As we close today, we are going to do something a little different. I am sending you out with homework. (Honestly, we should probably bring something away from worship with us every week, but this week we are going to be intentional.) It might have been a long time since you have remembered your personal story of redemption. For some of us, especially those of us who have followed Christ from a young age, we might never have thought about it. Our homework is to write out or otherwise record our personal testimonies. I have prepared a little worksheet of 7 questions to help you remember and as we distribute this worksheet, here are the 7 questions:

#### 7 Questions to Answer

- How old were you when you believed on Jesus as your Savior?
- When did this take place? Give the date, or the time of year, or maybe your grade in school at the time.
- Did you talk with anyone about your need of salvation? If so, who did God use to help you come to faith in Christ?
- What were the circumstances of your life at that time? In other words, what led to you coming to understand your need of the savior?
- What did God change about you or your life after you were saved or what difference has following Jesus made in your life?
- Why do you continue to follow Jesus?
- What is one Bible verse that speaks to your personal walk with Jesus?

Before you start to write, block out a little time, pray, and then commit to remembering the work of grace that God has done in your life.

#### Benediction in Song

“Knowing You” SASB #656

## 7 Questions to Answer

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- When did this take place? Give the date, or the time of year, or maybe your grade in school at the time.
- Did you talk with anyone about your need of salvation? If so, who did God use to help you come to faith in Christ?
- What were the circumstances of your life at that time? In other words, what led to you coming to understand your need of the savior?
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- Why do you continue to follow Jesus?
- What is one Bible verse that speaks to your personal walk with Jesus?

### **Week 3: Remember God's Power and Provision**

#### Call to Worship

After the Lord had delivered them out of Egypt, and had brought them to the borders of the promised land, Moses urged them to go up and possess it. ...But the circumstances were so discouraging, and they felt themselves to be so helpless, that they could not believe God would really do all He had said.

When we read the report of the spies we cannot be surprised at their discouragement; and we can even believe they would have felt that courage under such circumstances would be only foolhardiness. "The land through which we have gone to search it," the spies declared, "And there we saw the giants...and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." Nothing could have seemed humbler than for them to look upon themselves as poor, good-for-nothing grasshoppers; and true humility would have seemed to teach that it would be the height of presumption for grasshoppers to try to conquer giants. We also often feel ourselves to be but grasshoppers in the face of the giants of temptation and trouble that assail us, and we think ourselves justified in being discouraged. But the question is not, whether we are grasshoppers, but whether God is; for it is not we who have to fight these giants, but God.

From *The God of All Comfort* by Hannah Whithall Smith, page 179

#### Prayer

Don't be afraid; just believe. That is your responsibility in our relationship: Believe that My love for you is unending; believe and trust in My goodness. And when you get discouraged, quickly turn to Me; call out to Me for help and I will deliver you from trouble. My faithfulness will be your shield and your fortress. I will fill you with joy and peace as you trust in Me, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of My Spirit.

Don't be afraid; just believe. Be strong and courageous, for I am with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you. I will never betray My faithfulness. I am the Lord; when you hope in Me you will not be disappointed.

Don't be afraid; just believe.

From *The NIV Worship Bible*, page 1347

#### Responsive Scripture Reading

**Leader:** The first time Moses and the Hebrew people arrived at the edge of the territory God had given them to inhabit, Moses sent 12 men across the border. Ten of

the spies became frightened by the people they saw in the land. *And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said,*

**Response:** *“The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”* (Numbers 13: 33-34 NIV)

**Leader:** Because of this rumor, the people lost heart and rebelled against Moses and God. While God forgave the people, he would not allow this faithless and rebellious generation to enter the land he had promised them and so he sent that generation back into the wilderness to live out the rest of their days. In Deuteronomy, the next generation is finally ready to take the land that was promised to them.

**Response:** *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.*

**Leader:** *The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

**Response:** *Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.* (Deuteronomy 7: 6-9 NIV)

**Leader:** God promises abundant blessings to the people. God says, *“You will be blessed more than any other people”* (Deuteronomy 7:14a). God also gives instruction concerning the people who are already inhabiting the land.

**Response:** *You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you. You may say to yourselves, “These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?” But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt.* (Deuteronomy 7: 16-18 NIV)

Song:

“Who is on the Lord’s Side” SASB #992

“Power in the Blood” SASB #421

“Whom Shall I Fear” [https://youtu.be/R0gu0nOaFsl?si=zwUIG2rS0F\\_00EvZ](https://youtu.be/R0gu0nOaFsl?si=zwUIG2rS0F_00EvZ)

“God will Make a Way” SASB #492

“Oceans (Where Feet May Fail” <https://youtu.be/uZ75yIP1t0w?si=M3Vb4JAjFYlvbDho>

“Trust and Obey” SASB #690

“Trust in God” <https://youtu.be/TZ2lIVD-cP0?si=jKg5my1q8yko-S2C>

### Activity

**SUPPLIES:** 3 envelopes

*In one envelope place a blank piece of paper. In a second envelope place a paper that says, “Lemon Juice.” In the third envelope place a paper that says, “Everyone gets a treat.”*

To start, I need a volunteer.

*Choose a volunteer/contestant. Choose wisely, some people, especially children, may have a strong aversion to the lemon juice. When in doubt, choose an adult leader to help.*

Today I have three envelopes. One of these envelopes contains just a blank piece of paper. Inside one of these envelopes is a declaration that everyone gets a treat today and inside the last envelope is a declaration that [volunteer] has to drink lemon juice.

[Volunteer], are you feeling lucky? Go ahead and choose an envelope, but do not open it yet.

*Take envelope and set it aside without opening it and revealing what is inside.*

Sometimes we do not know what we are going to get. Inside your envelope there could be nothing at all, or it could be treats for everyone, or it could be lemon juice. When Moses and the people he was leading first got to the land that God had promised to give them, it had been 800 years since it was promised to their ancestor Abraham. Everyone that Moses was leading had been born in Egypt. There was no internet or travel books. They had no idea what they would find in the land that God had promised to them. They only knew that God had led them there, God had promised to give them that place to live, and the land was supposed to have an abundance of good things.

Moses sent 12 spies into the land (one from each of the 12 tribes of Israel). They found that the land was great. They brought back a grape vine that was so big it took two of them to carry it. Unfortunately, they also discovered that the people who were living there were like that grape vine – huge, very strong, and probably hard to cut down.

On the other hand, the people that Moses was leading were former slaves. They had very little. They had been traveling through the desert and felt weak and tired. When they saw the people who were living in the land that they were supposed to conquer, they were afraid. Only two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, trusted that the God who gave them their freedom from Egypt and lead them through the desert could give them victory.

When God heard the grumbling of the people and saw their fear, he turned them back to continue traveling in the desert and declared that the unfaithful spies would die of old age before he would give them the land. Only Caleb and Joshua would see God's promises come true.

What about [volunteer]? Will you get a bitter sip, a sweet treat, or nothing at all? Let's start by opening one of the envelopes that you did not choose.

*Allow the volunteer to choose an envelope.*

*Encourage the audience to help.*

Okay, this is the moment of truth. You get [list the remaining possibilities].

*Allow the volunteer to open their envelope. If it's nothing, nothing happens. If they get the lemon, give them a small sip of prepared lemon juice. If it's a treat, give everyone a treat.*

Let's give [volunteer] a hand for being such a good sport. While we might not know exactly what we are going to get, we can trust that God always knows and always keeps his promises.

### Sermon:

We tend to think of memories like files that are stored unchanged in our brains, but that's not exactly true. Memory is a much more complicated process than taking a file and storing it away for future reference.<sup>1</sup> It turns out our memories are malleable and dynamic. This is because every time we remember something, we are literally re-writing that memory in our brains. When we recall a poem or a verse of scripture, our brains write it out again as we speak it for the next time we need it. Then the next time we need it; our brain is writing it out again. Each time our brains write out a memory two things happen. First, it gets better at writing that memory, so we can write it faster and more accurately the next time. We remember it better. Secondly our minds can also introduce or erase information from that memory each time we remember it. This is more than interesting scientific theorizing, it is part of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4588064/>

the way that God wired up his creation. **It allows God to rewrite and redeem the failures of our past.**

Deuteronomy is not the first time these people have been at the border of the land promised to them by God. The first time they were here, they sent 12 spies into the land, and they saw why God had promised it to them. It was a land flowing with good things, but it was also inhabited by people who were bigger, stronger, and more powerful. “They are giants, and we are grasshoppers,” the spies declared. As a result, the people lost heart, and they were turned back into the wilderness. We can imagine that as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness and remembered, they began to add things to that memory: cowardice, fear, failure, untrusting, unworthy, disobedient, defeat... As the memory of the promised land was rewritten it became overlaid with a cloud of negativity which overshadowed the promise and provision of God. Moses is asking the people to remember again and to rewrite their story.

**They must remember that God wants them to be a sanctified, set apart, holy people.** Some find the first few verses of Deuteronomy 7 to be quite disturbing:

*When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you— and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. (Deuteronomy 7: 1-2 NIV)*

God makes it clear that when the Hebrews take over the land they are to completely and totally destroy whatever they find there. It was not God’s wish that His people simply blend into the land. God’s people and no other people were to occupy the land that he had given over to them.

Moreover, the language used in this passage is the same as that concerning sacrifices. These peoples and all their possessions were to be presented as a sacrifice, set apart for God’s use only! Notice that God even commands their idols to be burned as a sacrifice would be burned. (Deuteronomy 7:5)

In this time, it would be strange for the victors not to plunder the possessions of their enemies after a battle. It was practical to plunder. Many very useful things could be secured from a defeated enemy. Besides weapons, enemies often supplied beautiful daughters which could be married without a bride price. This would be very useful to wandering former slaves who had very little to offer a father-in-law in exchange for his daughter. Plunder was also the major way for soldiers to receive pay. When men would leave their farms, families, and trade to fight in the army, the gold of the enemy, was often used to compensate them for a long time away from any income making opportunity. In the case of the Hebrews plunder could mean already built temples and altars to dedicate to the one true God -- a chance to start out in the land with wealth and cities already established, but it was not to be. God strictly forbids these practices in Chapter 7 and moreover, marks everything in the

land to be His, exclusively His. Since God had no use for temples that were built for other Gods and gold and silver or even people who did not worship him alone, it meant that nearly everything in the land would have be destroyed, erased, and forgotten.

As contradictory as it might seem, sometimes the first step in remembering is forgetting. **We must make room in the cluttered recess of our past to remember God's goodness and grace.** We like to speak of total consecration – putting our all, our everything, into God's hands as the beginning of holiness. Why wouldn't that include our past? We must do away with those giants of our past that dominated our thinking and made us turn our backs on God's plan: utterly destroying our doubts, our feelings of unworthiness, and our guilt about sin that God has already forgiven.

When we rid ourselves of those things, we find like the Hebrews that the memories we write are filled with God's love and faithfulness. Moses uses verses 7-13 to retell the story of his people and not surprisingly, it sounds a lot like our story.

*Deuteronomy 7:7 The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.*

God chose them and God chooses us too. **God chooses us not because we are perfect or sinless or great, but because he loves us.** In the words of 1 Corinthians 1: 27- 28 *“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.”*

*Deuteronomy 7:8 But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

**Just as God redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt, GOD redeems us from the slavery of sin.** Romans 6 explains that we are no longer slaves to sin, but rather we have received the Spirit of adoption as sons and daughters of God. Christ paid the price for our redemption by dying on the cross while we were still sinners.

*Deuteronomy 7:9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.*

**God loves us and he is faithful to his covenant of love. Even now, God is preparing his Church as a bride clothed in righteousness because Jesus Christ continues to be the faithful bridegroom**

*Deuteronomy 7:13a &14a He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. You will be blessed more than any other people.*

**God promises blessing upon blessing.** Their crops will grow. Their livestock will increase. Their numbers will increase. They will never get sick. These are the incredible blessings that God through Moses starts promising.

It's understandable if the Israelites, standing there on the border of the Promised Land, knowing that they were grasshoppers about to go up against giants, considered that this was a little too good to be true. If we keep reading their story, we find out that they did not exactly do what God tells them to do. As a result, they forfeit some of God's blessings for them. They allow fear and doubt to be written into their story. They fail to remember that God is true. God is powerful. God is faithful.

Like the people of Deuteronomy, God wants to rewrite our story. Christian speaker, author, and artist Joni Eareckson Tada was paralyzed as the result of a diving accident when she was 17 years old. She spent many hours asking God why and feeling sorry for herself. She was plagued with anger and even suicidal thoughts, but during her rehabilitation, she began learning how to paint and write by holding a pen and brush in her mouth. This led to a bestselling book and an inspirational movie which led to speaking engagements and eventually meeting her husband who helped her set up an international center to help other folks with similar disabilities and to advocate for accessibility. In looking back on her life, she openly says that her diving accident was the most important event in her life and more of a blessing than anything else. Without it, she would probably have lived an obscure, ordinary life, but because of it she has led an extraordinary life. That's allowing God to rewrite your story!

What about us? Will we allow God to lead us in facing the giants of our past? Will we be fearless enough to step out in faith and rewrite our story? Can we pray the words of the familiar worship song "Oceans:"

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders  
Let me walk upon the waters, Wherever You would call me.  
Take me deeper than my feet could every wander  
And my faith will be made stronger in the presence of my savior.

### Benediction

Faithful God,  
When I am filled with fear concerning the challenges around me and ahead of me, grant that I will be quick to remember Your great deliverances in the past. Blessed Redeemer, You have delivered me from the guilt and consequences of my sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You will continue to deliver me until I am safely home in that place that is truly home. Amen.

*The NIV Worship Bible, page 233*

## Week 4: Remember the Wilderness

### Call to Worship

Remember every road that GOD led you on for those forty years in the wilderness, pushing you to your limits, testing you so that he would know what you were made of, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

Moses said that God tested the Israelites in order to know what was in their hearts. God, of course, already knew what was in their hearts. The point is that their obedience or disobedience had to be proven in history.

God led them into the desert where they had no alternative but to trust Him or to murmur against Him. In the desert they could not produce their own food but had to depend on God for food and thus for their very lives. When Moses reminded them that they did not live on bread alone he meant that even their food was decreed by the word of God. They had manna because it came by His command. It was therefore ultimately not bread that kept them alive but His word! "Bread alone," that is, bread acquired independently of His word, could not keep them alive.

*From The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### Prayer Focus

Trust is how you put your spiritual life in neutral. Trust is confidence in the character of God. Firmly and deliberately you say, "I do not understand what God is doing or even where God is, but I know that he is out to do me good." This is trust. This is how to wait.

I do not fully understand the reasons for the wildernesses of God's absence. This I do know: while the wilderness is necessary, it is never meant to be permanent. In God's time and in God's way the desert will give way to a land flowing with milk and honey.

*From Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard Foster*

### Song Selection

"Blessed Be Your Name" SAHC #97

"Never Mind Go On" [https://youtu.be/AuXaH5b\\_1yo?si=iTLojPpRqRIZbwKW](https://youtu.be/AuXaH5b_1yo?si=iTLojPpRqRIZbwKW)

"More Than Able" <https://youtu.be/T6WmjC4yAGc?si=wGXwpZ30BQpOnpVb>

"Bow the Knee" SAHC #122

"Step by Step" SAHC #42

"He Leadeth Me" SASB #645

"Follow, Follow" SASB #832

### Scripture

**Deuteronomy 8:1-10**

## Activity

*Supplies: pictures or pieces of camping equipment, a map.*

Has anyone here ever gone camping? What are some things you might need when you go camping? [*tent, sleeping bag, camp stove, bug spray, raincoat, knife, hatchet, Firestarter, backpack, etc.*]

One of the things I know about camping is not having the right equipment can turn it from a fun experience into a miserable experience. No one wants to sleep in a leaky tent when it rains or get covered in itchy red spots when they forget their bug spray. Unfortunately, in the wilderness you also cannot just run to the store to get what you need.

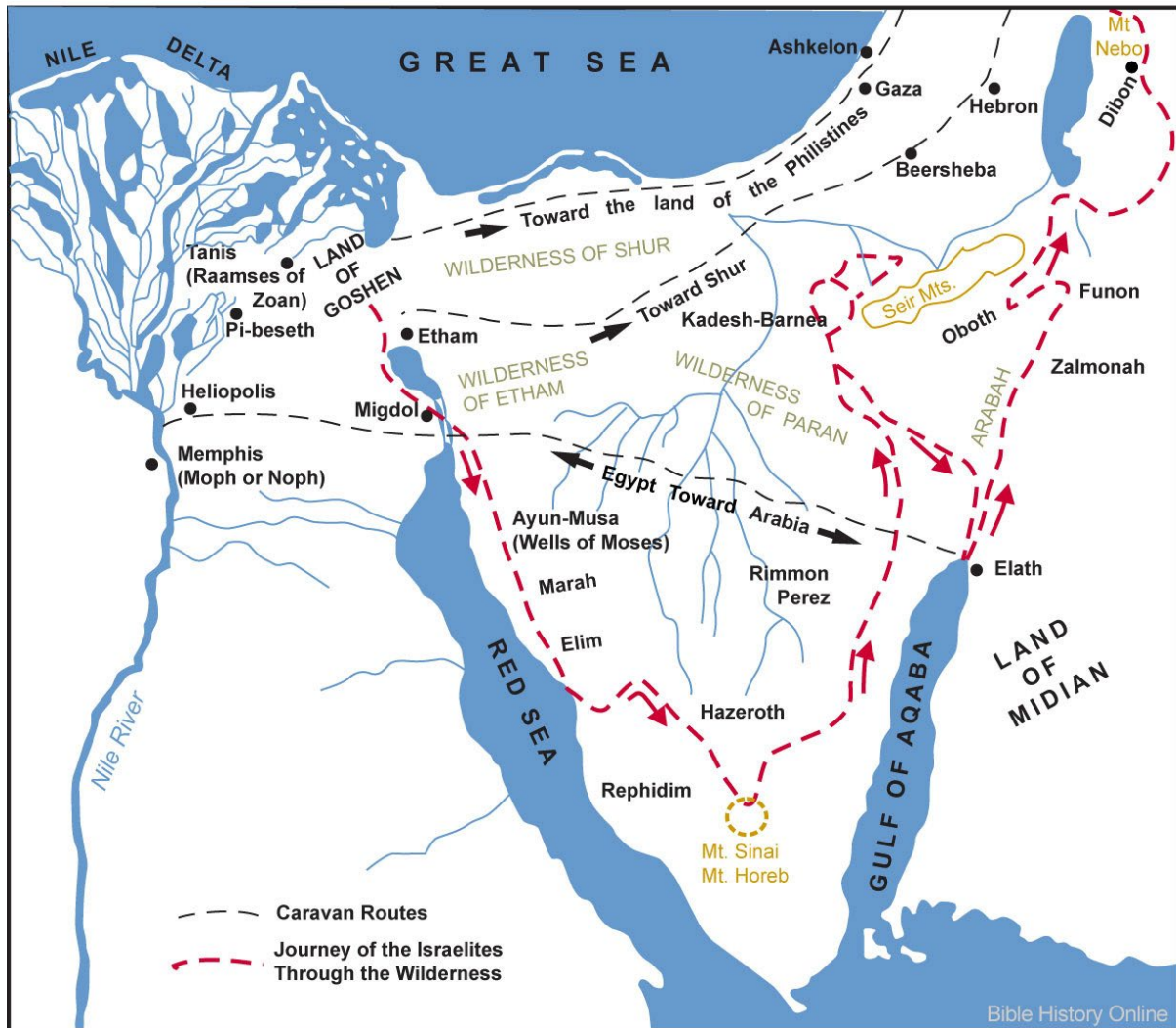
One of the most essential things that you need when you go camping is a map. A good map helps you to know where you are going and unlike your cellphone or GPS a good map will not run out of power and leave you stranded. Maps show where to get supplies, where to set up your tent, and most importantly where the bathrooms are! A good map helps campers avoid places they should not go and get to where they need to go.

In the book of Exodus in the Old Testament, we read that God guided the people. Exodus 13:21 says, *“By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.”* God was their map! He was like a GPS that never loses its batteries. It was very important that the people followed God because they were traveling in the wilderness. God had to provide them with food and water. God protected them every step of the way. We even read in Deuteronomy 8:4 that as they traveled in the wilderness, *“Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.”*

We might not be able to see God in a pillar of fire or a cloud, but God is still leading us. What are some of the ways that God leads us? [*Bible, Holy Spirit, Godly mentors, etc.*] When we follow God every step of the way, he helps us to avoid places that we should avoid and get to the places that we need to be. I am so thankful that God is my map.

## Sermon Notes

## ROUTE OF THE EXODUS OF THE ISRAELITES FROM EGYPT



One of my favorite Sunday school choruses is “My Lord Knows the Way through the Wilderness.” It goes:

“My Lord knows the way through the wilderness,  
 All I have to do is follow.  
 My Lord knows the way through the wilderness,  
 All I have to do is follow.  
 Strength for today is mine all the way,  
 And all that I need for tomorrow.  
 My Lord knows the way through the wilderness,  
 All I have to do is follow.”

The wilderness through which Moses led the Hebrews (otherwise known as the Sinai Peninsula) is relatively small. At its widest point, it is about 210 km across. Modern travelers can drive from one end to the other in less than 4 hours. In ancient times, it was a journey of a week or two. The route most people take is right along the northern coast, following the Mediterranean Sea. Three thousand years ago, the advantage of this route was being able to resupply with food from the sea along the way. Unfortunately, this route was closed to Moses and his people because it was

controlled by the Philistines who would not have appreciated a nation of escaped Hebrew slaves (Exodus records 600,000 men plus women and children) traveling through their territory. The longer route is South along the Red Sea and then turning north to travel along the Gulf of Aqaba. Going this way was longer, but it both avoided the Philistines and provided that all-important food source from the sea.

While no one knows for certain their exact path, we do know that Moses and the Israelite people did not take either of these well-established routes. Instead, they followed God in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night through the interior of the wilderness – an arid desert land which featured both limestone cliffs and plains that when wet can reveal mud pits capable of swallowing whole families. We also know that this was not a short trip. Instead of a couple of weeks, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Further we know that it was a difficult journey. The Bible records the people encountering fires, venomous snakes, and complaining numerous times about the lack of food and water. Several times they literally proposed returning to slavery in Egypt rather than continuing the journey.

Like the people Moses led, we often pray for God's leading and guidance. We cry out for God to deliver us from our difficult situations, but what happens when that deliverance means that we are led into the wilderness by the long route? How do we survive the wilderness of our faith, when we cry out like the people cry in the book of Numbers, "Have you brought us here to die?" and begin to openly question God's faithfulness, love, and plan for us?

To these questions, Moses does not give any of the usual answers: "Hey toughen up!" "You call that a wilderness!" "Things could be worse." "Don't worry, be happy." Instead, **Moses tells his people to remember and even embrace the wilderness, because God led us to this place and God is the only one who can see beyond the desert to a place which flows with good things, the land of his promise.**

Remember why God leads us into the wilderness. According to Deuteronomy 8:2 part of the reason that God brings us into wilderness is to humble us. Moses explains in 8:3 – "*He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*" (NIV)

Wildernesses are places that we cannot possibly get through on our own. Moses was leading more than one million people in a land without the resources to support them; therefore, they had to rely on God's miraculous provision. Exodus 16 and 17 tells us that God sent manna for the people to make bread, drove quail into the camp for the people to eat meat, and made water flow from a rock for the people to drink. In this way God sustained the whole community for 40 years.

The problem is never that God will not or cannot sustain us. The problem is that there is not enough room in our lives for both God's sustenance and grace and our pride. Eventually God will lead us to a place where we must choose one over the other.

My husband and I are fans of the survival television challenge, *Alone*. During season 3, one of the contestants, Dave Nussia, was able to catch a lot of fish which he dried over a fire so that they would be preserved until he needed them. Unfortunately,



Dave decided not to eat the fish until (in his opinion) he absolutely had no choice. Week after week we tuned in to witness Dave getting thinner and thinner while he was surrounded by food. Dave ended up being the first contestant in the show's history who was removed from the competition for medical reasons. His body was shutting down from starvation. When the show's doctors forced him to quit, Dave had 33 fish waiting to be eaten! I wonder how many of us are surrounded by God's blessing and provision, but like Dave, we believe ourselves to be so strong that we do not need that provision.

Moses understood that in the land of God's promise, the people would not need to worry about physical hunger as they did in the wilderness; however, they would still face the dangers of spiritual starvation if they did not continue to rely on God every day to sustain them. If God can sustain a million people in an inhospitable wilderness for 40 years, what can he do for us? Luke 1:27 in the Jubilee Bible exclaims, "*For with God nothing is impossible.*" We only need to set aside our pride and doubts.

The wilderness is also designed to teach and prepare us for what is ahead. As we in The Salvation Army explore this idea of legacy and sustainability, one of the things we must accept is that we do not know all the challenges and blessings that our future holds. Out of the more than one million people that Moses led, only Caleb and Joshua had stepped foot on the land which the people were going to occupy and that was 40 years ago. To be led by God through the wilderness is to accept that we do not know what exactly lies ahead and to believe in faith that God does.

To take that one step further, understanding one facet of legacy as the act of remembering and living with the knowledge of that memory, is having radical faith in the idea that whatever God is leading me through today will prepare me for tomorrow. Listen to Deuteronomy 8:5 in the NIRV: "*Here is what I want you to know in your hearts. The Lord your God guides you, just as parents guide their children.*" How do we learn not to touch a hot stove? Our parents probably allowed us to touch a stove which was hot enough to hurt, but not so hot that we would get seriously

injured. How did we learn to tell the truth? We were probably punished after being caught in a lie. This is the imagery that Moses is employing. In some ways, childhood is all about learning big important lessons in small unimportant ways. Later in life when our choices have real meaning and impact, we rely on those lessons to guide us. In other words, we could not handle what God has for us today if God had not led us through the wilderness in the past.

**Difficult wilderness experiences are what God uses to shape us into the people who can occupy the places and ministries that only God can see in our future.** When the shepherd boy David had to face a lion and a bear to save his sheep, only God knew that was in preparation for facing down Goliath. When Catherine Booth was bedridden for many days as a teen and her only comfort was reading and studying her Bible, only God knew that one day she would be called upon to defend The Salvation Army's position on women in ministry, abstinence from alcohol, and social justice. There is no difficulty that we face which God cannot redeem and use for his glory.

Even now, even today, God is preparing us for his glory just as he was preparing the people who Moses led for the land of promise. The challenge before us is to humbly believe and trust the places where God is leading.

#### Benediction

##### **Psalm 68:28 (NIRV)**

God, show us your power.

Show us your strength.

God, do as you have done before.

## Week 5: Remember You are God's People

### Call to Worship

A hardened heart is not uncommon today. It can happen to anyone, regardless of his or her personal or spiritual strength. A hardened heart is evidence of a spiritual problem. That's what happened to the Israelites; that's what happens to us. The Israelites grew spiritually impatient. They didn't want to wait for Moses to return from his meeting with God; they didn't want to waste time on their way to the Promised Land. We have the same problem – we grow impatient when God doesn't do things according to our schedules. We get angry when we don't understand why the journey is taking so long. We begin to question God's love for us. We say, "Maybe God loves some people, but he obviously doesn't love me."

John 3:16 tells us that "God so loved the world..." That's an all-inclusive statement that we often overlook. The Israelites made the mistake of believing that God's love was limited to those he favored. We often conclude that some people have God's favor while others don't. We easily forget what God has done for us.

From 3:16: *A Study for small Groups* by Max Lucado

### Prayer Focus:

I heard of a Saviour whose love was so great  
That he laid down his life on the tree;  
The thorns they were pierced on his beautiful brow  
To pardon a rebel like me.  
O love so amazing that broke my hard heart  
And brought me, dear Jesus, to thee!  
I know, when I came, thou didst not cast me out  
But didst pardon a rebel like me.

SASB #331

### Song Selection:

"Your Love, O Lord" [https://youtu.be/0OBRvxrzhqs?si=yHm4O-ym40\\_S3b-6](https://youtu.be/0OBRvxrzhqs?si=yHm4O-ym40_S3b-6)

"Sing for Joy" SAHC #129

"You Never Let Go" SAHC #185

"Oh You Bring" <https://youtu.be/-OBjyiNS10E?si=V5glYzS4S0yTeKhM>

"Great is Thy Faithfulness" SASB #26

"Faithful God" SASB #360

"What a Friend" SASB #795

"No Longer a Slave" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ev\\_TIXp3kuM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ev_TIXp3kuM)

"Thrive" [https://youtu.be/qQ71RWJhS\\_M?si=CfFDSluZ3yu55GDT](https://youtu.be/qQ71RWJhS_M?si=CfFDSluZ3yu55GDT)

Responsive Scripture Reading:

**Leader:** *Know this and don't ever forget it: It's not because of any good that you've done that GOD is giving you this good land to own. Anything but! You're stubborn as mules. Keep in mind and don't ever forget how angry you made GOD, your God, in the wilderness. You've kicked and screamed against GOD from the day you left Egypt until you got to this place, rebels all the way. (Deuteronomy 9:6-7 MSG)*

**Response:** But God, we are your people. You have called us your treasured possession.

**Leader:** Remember the idol you made at Horeb. *That's when I saw it: There you were, sinning against GOD, your God—you had made yourselves a cast god in the shape of a calf! So soon you had left the road that GOD had commanded you to walk on. (Deuteronomy 9:16 MSG)*

**Response:** That idol was destroyed, crushed up into dust and thrown into the water. It is gone for good, old news.

**Leader:** What about Taberah? Only three days' walk away from the place where Moses ground up that golden calf, you began to grumble.

**Response:** *The people fell to grumbling over their hard life. GOD heard. When he heard his anger flared; then fire blazed up and burned the outer boundaries of the camp. They named the place Taberah (Blaze) because fire from GOD had blazed up against them. (Numbers 11:1-3 MSG)*

**Leader:** After Taberah there was Massah. *He named the place Massah (Testing-Place) and Meribah (Quarreling) because of the quarreling of the Israelites and because of their testing of GOD when they said, "Is GOD here with us, or not?" (Exodus 17:7 MSG)*

**Response:** In that place God showed us his presence and made water come from the rock. We remember.

**Leader:** Remember also Kibroth Hattaavah (Graves-of-the-Craving) where the people doubted God could give them meat. God provided piles and piles of quail, so much food that the people became sick and died.

**Response:** God's anger burned against us. How could we forget?

**Leader:** *The most recent was when GOD sent you out from Kadesh Barnea, ordering you: "Go. Possess the land that I'm giving you." And what did you do? You rebelled. Rebelled against the clear orders of GOD, your God. Refused to trust him. Wouldn't*

obey him. You've been rebels against GOD from the first day I knew you.  
(Deuteronomy 9:23-24 MSG)

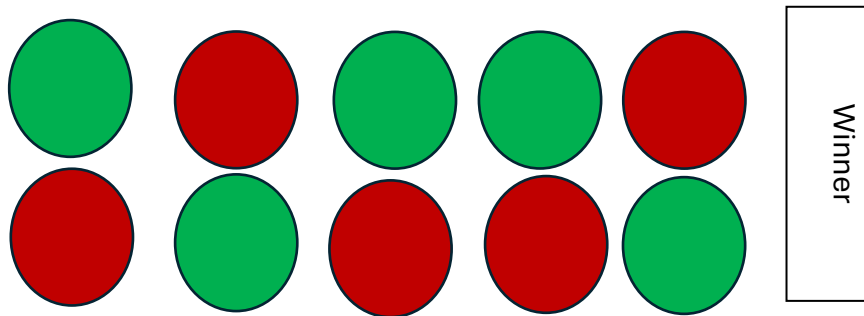
**Response:** But we are God's people, His treasured possession.

**Leader:** Yes. "They are your people still, your inheritance whom you powerfully and sovereignly rescued." (Deuteronomy 9:29 MSG)

### Activity

*SUPPLIES: 10 small cups, 5 green circles and 5 red circles (small enough to fit under the cups)*

*Set up the cups in 2 rows of 5 cups each. In each pair of cups, place one red circle and one green circle. Below is an example.*



Today, we are going to test your memory again. In this game, you must make it through the five levels to win. All you need to do is choose all the cups with green.

Okay, I need a volunteer to go first. Choose 1 cup in the first row. If there's a green circle under that cup, you get to go again. If there's a red circle under the cup, it's the next player's turn.

*Have the volunteer reveal their choice. If it is a red circle place the cup over the circle again and call up the next volunteer. If it is a green circle they can choose a cup in the second row. As soon as they reveal a red circle, recover all the circles and call up the next volunteer.*

Sorry, you chose a red circle. We are going to cover up all the circles and have our next volunteer come up.

Here's where you need to remember! In the first row, which cup do you choose?

*If they remembered correctly, they will be able to easily choose the green circle in the first row.*

In the second row, which cup do you choose?

*Continue going up the levels until a red circle is chosen, then recover all the circles and call up the next volunteer. Continue until someone can make it through all 5 pairs revealing only the green circles.*

Great job! In this game, it is very important to remember both your successful choices and those that were not so successful.

In our Bible reading today, Moses reminded the people that they also did not always make the best choices. Sometimes they chose to rebel against God, sometimes they chose to grumble rather than thank God for his blessings. Sometimes they chose not to believe in God's promises.

Moses was not asking them to remember these things to make them feel bad. Like our game, remembering would help them learn from their choices and move forward.

Sometimes we would rather forget our bad choices. Other times we replay our bad choices so often that they come to define us. Neither way is what God wants from us. As important as it is to learn from our past, it is our relationship with God that defines who we are, not our mistakes.

### Sermon Notes

Randolph Churchill, the son of the famous World War II leader and Prime Minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill, was a failed politician and had a reputation for being a rude drunk. His parents often had to pay off his debts and while his father professed a deep love for his son, it was said that the two could not be in the same room for long without a loud argument ensuing. Angelica Hamilton, the eldest daughter of Alexander Hamilton one of America's Founding Fathers, was born into a politically well-connected family with a bright future ahead of her. Unfortunately, she suffered a breakdown after the death of her older brother from which she never recovered. She was said to exist the rest of her days in a perpetual state of childhood. She often did not recognize the members of her own family as they aged and talked of her older brother as if he was still alive. While most of us do not have famous parents, we probably understand what it is like to be born with the weight of expectation whether good or bad. **When I was in high school, I recall telling someone my name and that person replying, "Schafer? That's a name we never have to type on a diploma!"**

Exodus records that God led about 600,000 Hebrew men from bondage in Egypt into the wilderness. Because of their disobedience and grumbling in the wilderness that generation of Hebrew slaves as well as Moses himself was not allowed to inherit the land of promise. Under the leadership of Joshua, the next generation will be the

ones to conquer and inherit the land that God has promised. **The people to whom Moses was speaking in Deuteronomy are the generation between slavery and freedom in a place they can call their own. While they have inherited a promise, they have only known the wilderness.**

Not only have they known the hardships of the wilderness, but they have also known the disobedience and rebellion of the wilderness. God might lead us into the wilderness, but most of the time we have a way of making that experience a whole lot worse. A few years ago, in the US state of Missouri a man was camping with his young sons when a venomous snake slithered into their campsite. The man was an experienced outdoorsman, so he decided that this was an excellent opportunity to teach his young sons a valuable lesson about the dangers of handling venomous snakes. Unfortunately, as the man picked up the snake to show his children how to identify the familiar triangular shaped head and heat sensing pits located between the snake's eyes and nose, the man got his hands too close to the snake's head and the snake struck. As though this was not bad enough, the man did not want to ruin a fun camping trip with his family or cause his children undue alarm, so he released the snake and decided to lie down for a bit. A few hours later people from a neighboring campsite called the paramedics, but it was too late to save the man's life.

It might be tempting to judge this man's foolishness and using the anonymity of the internet many did; however, this story illustrates how quickly most people abandon the things they know to be true when something unexpected or difficult happens. As soon as Moses went up the mountainside to receive the 10 Commandments and the people lost sight of him, they forgot about the Almighty God and made for themselves a golden calf to worship. God is so angry that he offers to destroy them and restart with Moses, but Moses pleads with God on behalf of the people. **He reminds God that these are his people who have descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While they do not exhibit the faith or wisdom of their forefathers, they have inherited the promises.**

Sadly, the wilderness is littered with place names which memorialize a people who had consistently and foolishly forgotten a God who claimed them as his own and redeemed them from bondage. There's "Blaze" where God's anger burned as fire because the people complained that the journey was too hard. There's "Testing" and "Quarreling" where the people thought God had not given enough and "Graves-of-the-Craving" where God gave too much and the people were gluttons.

The people had a shallow idea of what it meant to be "God's people." They chose on the one hand to abandon God at the first sign of trouble but chose on the other hand to blame God for every inconvenience and problem. God wants to make it very clear that these people are not entering the land of promise as some reward. **They are not God's people because of their righteousness or faithfulness. They have been neither. They are God's people because of his righteousness and faithfulness.**

They carry God's name not as a title but as an inheritance. This carries great meaning for us as well.

Each of us are here in this church because God has laid claim to our lives. We are his people. We were not born to be God's people. Ephesians 1:5 explains,

*“So he decided long ago to adopt us. He adopted us as his children with all the rights children have. He did it because of what Jesus Christ has done. It pleased God to do it.”*

It's important that we do not believe for a moment that our status as a child of God or a Christian is a gold embossed certificate. Our legacy is not a diploma or a soldier's covenant. It is not something to hang on a wall. We must move beyond the idea that our status before God is something that we earned.

We must also move beyond the idea that our status is something into which we were born. We are not God's people because we are naturally more inclined to holiness. It is not because we were born of Christian parents. Like the people in Deuteronomy, we are inclined to rebellion and grumbling. Our real heritage is our sin nature, our natural inclination to choose our own way over God's way. No matter if we have a famous name or not, we were born into a sinful world and destined to buy into its corruption and depravity.

*We are God's people because of the movement of God on our behalf. As the Apostle Paul declares at the beginning of 1Corinthians 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am.”* We have the privilege to declare that we are God's people because God keeps his promises. We trust in faith in the words of John 1:12 *“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* and Ephesians 1:4, *“God chose us to belong to Christ before the world was created. He chose us to be holy and without blame in his eyes. He loved us.”*

*Like the people in Deuteronomy, we have inherited a promise, a promise of a better place where God's goodness and blessings will flow.* Jesus has promised to prepare a place for us away from the wilderness of this world. In John 14: 1-2 (KJ21) he said, *“In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.”*

The challenge set before us is to prepare today for the land which lies ahead of us. To live here and now as the people of God, chosen and loved by God, inheritors of a promise and destined for a heavenly home.

## Benediction

### **1Peter 2: 9-10 (AMP)**

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a special people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies the wonderful deeds and virtues and perfections of Him who called you

out of darkness into His marvelous light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people at all, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## Week 6: Remember to Obey

### Call to Worship

The words “You shall love the Lord your God” become in the end less a command than a promise. And the promise is that, yes, on the weary feet of faith and the fragile wings of hope, we will come to love him at last as from the first he has loved us - loved us even in the wilderness, especially in the wilderness, because he has been in the wilderness with us. He has been in the wilderness for us. He has been acquainted with our grief. And, loving him, we will come at last to love each other too so that, in the end, the name taped on every door will be the name of the one we love.

“And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

And rise we shall, out of the wilderness, every last one of us, even as out of the wilderness Christ rose before us. That is the promise, and the greatest of all promises.

from *A Room Called Remember* by Fredrick Buechner

### Prayer Focus

#### **1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 (MSG)**

Every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Day and night you're in our prayers as we call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ, before God our Father. It is clear to us, friends, that God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on you for something special.

### Song Selection:

“Standing on the Promises” SASB #757

“I Trust in God” <https://youtu.be/TZ2lIVD-cP0?si=0zUDmh4ii7qwIWtU>

“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” SASB #445

“Follow, Follow On” SASB #832

“I Will Follow” [https://youtu.be/BWXR-XkOViQ?si=\\_EWeoblgKZ-d7POf](https://youtu.be/BWXR-XkOViQ?si=_EWeoblgKZ-d7POf)

“Step by Step” SAHC #42

“O Happy Day” SASB #882

### Responsive Scripture:

**Leader:** *So love the Eternal your God and always obey His requirements, regulations, judgments, and commands. Now keep this in mind: it was you, not your children, who saw and experienced firsthand all the lessons the Eternal your God*

*taught you. You saw how He demonstrated His majesty and His overwhelming power. (Deuteronomy 11: 1-2 The Voice)*

**Response:** *If you carefully obey My commands which I'm giving you today, and if you love Me and serve Me with your whole heart and soul, then I'll send rain on your land when it's needed, in the autumn and the spring. You'll have an abundant harvest of grain and wine and olive oil. I'll make grass grow in the fields for your cattle. You'll eat all you need and be totally satisfied.*

**Leader:** *But watch out! Don't be seduced, so that you turn away from the Lord. Don't abandon Him to worship other gods or bow down to them! (Deuteronomy 11: 13-16 The Voice)*

**Response:** *So let what I'm saying sink deeply into your hearts and souls. Do whatever it takes to remember what I'm telling you: tie a reminder on your hand or put a reminder on your forehead where you'll see it all the time, and on the doorpost where you cross the threshold or on the city gate.*

**Leader:** *Teach these things to your children. Talk about them when you're sitting together in your home and when you're walking together down the road. Make them the last thing you talk about before you go to bed and the first thing you talk about the next morning. (Deuteronomy 11: 18-20 The Voice)*

**Response:** *If you carefully obey all these things I'm commanding you—if you really do love the Eternal your God and live as He wants you to and devote yourselves to Him— Then He will drive out all of these nations ahead of you. You'll conquer nations that are bigger and stronger than you are. (Deuteronomy 11: 22-23 The Voice)*

**Leader:** *Look, you've got two choices: you can be blessed, or you can be cursed. If you obey His commands, which I'm giving you today, you'll be blessed. If you don't obey His commands—if you leave the path I'm showing you today so you can worship other gods who are foreign to you, then you'll be cursed. (Deuteronomy 11: 26-28 The Voice)*

**All:** We choose obedience and blessing.

Activity:

Today we are going to play "Statue." This game is super simple. When I say "Go," you must strike a pose and remain completely still like a statue. I am going to ask our

audience to help me watch for any movement. If you move, you are out. The last person standing completely still like a statue wins.

*Say "Go!" and assign a few people to keep watch. This game can take a long time. Consider singing a song while you wait. Other options are tickling the statues noses with a feather, making a funny face, telling a joke, etc.*

Let's give our winner a big round of applause!

While it might be difficult standing still like a statue in this game, somehow, we find it much easier when it comes to doing the things that we ought to do. For instance, the last time it was time to clean, I found it a lot easier to sit still on the sofa and watch TV. When it is time to go out and run chores and the sun is blazing outside, I would much rather stay still in the house.

In Deuteronomy, the people are called "stiff-necked" that meant that rather than going and doing what God told them to do they stubbornly stood still. Instead of standing still, Moses says in Deuteronomy 11: 22 *"Be careful to obey all these commands I am giving you. Show love to the Lord your God by walking in his ways and holding tightly to him."* God wants us to not just stand there. He wants us to do something for him.

What are some of the things that we can do for God? [*Help others, participate in worship, pray, read our Bibles, etc.*] We might be surprised by the things that Holy Spirit tells us to do. Moses was told to take his shoes off. Ezekiel laid on his side for over a year. Isaiah preached naked (ONLY do that when you are sure God tells you to do it). Elijah poured water all over an altar he wanted to set on fire. Peter went fishing to find money to pay the temple tax. Phillip ran next to a chariot. Paul took the gospel to places and people who had never heard of God's love before.

Whatever God tells us to do, it is important that instead of standing still, we do it.

### Sermon

Remembering can be a double-edged sword. If someone close to you has died like a parent, sibling, spouse, or friend, you probably know what I mean. There is both great comfort in remembering that person and knowing that you loved that person deeply, and great pain in realizing that person is gone. In Deuteronomy, Moses acknowledges that memory can be both good and bad. He wants the people to remember that God is powerful and nearby, so he recalls the fear the people felt

at Horeb as the mountain shook, and God spoke. He urges the people to remember slavery, because it allows them to remember liberation. In chapter 8 of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of how God led and cared for them during their time in the wilderness. In chapter 9, Moses turns to the people's actions in the wilderness. He reminds them of their faithlessness, their rebellion, and their grumbling. On the other side of that memory are lessons on obedience and hope.

As the NRSV states in Deuteronomy 9:7, "*Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord from the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place.*" They consistently disobeyed. They rebelled and doubted. Now they were about to enter the land of God's promise. Had their experiences in the wilderness taught them anything? It was time for them to break from their past failures and choose once and for all the kind of people they were going to be. They could either choose the pain and curses of the past or choose the blessings and promises of the future.

If they were going to be people of blessing, they would need to be willing to change. Moses uses the phrase "stiff-necked" three times in chapters 9 and 10. The term was originally used to describe the oxen that would be yoked to plough fields, pull carts and do other tasks of burden. You can imagine that some oxen would feel the yoke around their necks and tighten their muscles and not allow their master to move them. Eventually this same term came to mean everything from hard-heartedness to stubbornness to a glutton for punishment. Oxen are too valuable to kill for such an infraction and in fact almost all of them would do this at one time or another. The only choice the master had in this circumstance was to punish the beast by whipping it, yanking violently on the yoke, or poking it with an ox goad in an effort to force the ox to become submissive again. In the wilderness, God was often required to correct the stiff-necked people. Perhaps the most radical example was that He made them drink their own golden calf. When at the foot of Sinai, the people worried that their leader, Moses, would never return and the comforting golden idols of Egypt were many miles away; they made a golden calf of their own to worship. At that moment, the burden of just staying there at the foot of the mountain seemed too great to bear and so stiff-necked they went their own way. The way that was exactly the opposite of God's will.

If the people were going to be blessed in the place they were about to occupy, they had to be willing to submit to the yoke of the master. This would often mean that they would have what seemed to be a heavy burden to bear. In the coming days, they were facing a war against giants, being surrounded by hostile enemies and occupying a whole new land that they had never even seen before. Surely at times the yoke would seem heavy and burdensome, but they could not afford to be stiff-necked, because the master would care for them. Like the oxen who at the end of a day of toil are promised rest, food and care, so too the people of God could find rest and care from their master if they endured the burden.

**The first step in breaking the stiff-necked is learning that we are not the masters.**

Major Paul and I have raised a few puppies in our family and the first rule when training a puppy is to teach the puppy their place in the family. Especially if that puppy is going to grow into a dog of 25 or more kg, it's important to teach them when they are small to obey. This means that the master must hold down the puppy without hurting it until it learns to stop squirming. We also had our children do this, so the puppy learned to respect and obey them as well. It means picking up the puppy to let it know that you are stronger and bigger and carefully rewarding the puppy for good behavior. In this way, the puppy develops a healthy perspective of its place in the family. In the same way, we need to establish a healthy perspective of ourselves in relation to God. At times, it might mean that we need to be held down or held back because God knows that we are not ready or we need to wait. For instance, God often chooses to answer our prayers in his time in his way. He knows when and how to bless us. At other times, it might mean getting picked up and realizing that we cannot do it ourselves.

If understanding and appreciating the role of the master is the first step in breaking a stiff-necked ox, the second step is recognizing and appreciating the role of the other ox. Oxen often worked as a pair, yoked together with rope and wood. Properly pairing oxen was very important. If one animal was significantly stronger, bigger, or unwilling; it would make the work almost impossible to do. Particularly unevenly matched oxen could injure each other. The Apostle Paul uses this same metaphor as a warning in 2Corinthians 6:14 when he writes, "*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?*" When Moses warned against being stiff-necked, it was a warning not merely to individuals within the community. It came with the understanding that being stiff-necked impacted everyone. It would make completing the hard work ahead of them nearly impossible.

**Occupying the land of promise was going to require a team effort. The stiff-necked people had to realize that "I" was not the most important.** Did you know that English is the only language that capitalizes the first-person pronoun, "I"? For some of us, the importance of self is written into the language we use every day. Even if English is not your first language, it is important for us to replace the attitude which capitalizes and gives central importance to "I" with a mindset which places the most importance on God, who introduced himself to Moses as the great "I AM."

Moses ends this section with a new calling to obedience. In chapter 11, he urges obedience no less than 5 times. Deuteronomy 11: 22-23 says

*If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow—to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him and to hold fast to him— then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you.*

Moses continues in verses 26-28:

*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse— the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.*

**The choice which Moses lays out for the people is very simple: if they obey, they will be blessed and if they disobey, they will not be blessed.**

Eventually the master had no choice but to turn a stiff-necked animal over to the butcher. Not only did the animal no longer serve its purpose, but it was taking resources away from the other animals and causing them to work harder. For 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness, the Lord had been patient with the stiff-necked people. Moses was warning them that God’s patience would not last forever. There were consequences to their faithless rebellion. If they were going to survive and thrive in the coming days, they would need to learn, listen, and obey.

This sermon began with the idea that remembering can be a two-edged sword. Legacy is similar. **Some of us live with a legacy of diabetes. My grandmothers on both sides of my family went blind because of diabetic retinopathy.** There are legacies of chemical dependency, untreated mental illness, and unhealthy relationships. We can say that those things were left to us. We did not have a choice, or we can make a conscious decision to step into God’s promises and blessing. God desires for us to leave not a legacy of pain, sickness, or brokenness; but for us to leave a legacy of faith, hope, and love.

### Benediction in Song

“When I Remember That He Died for Me” SAHC #52

## Week 7: Remember to be Careful

### Call to Worship:

Sins of the spirit are as destructive as sins of the flesh, and sometimes they are worse. Miriam was guilty of pride, envy, evil speaking, and lack of love. But even more, sins within families are especially painful, as are sins among the leaders of God's people. If God gave leprosy to every leader who envied other leaders and criticized them, there wouldn't be many healthy people left!

These special reminders apply to us today. Bad memories can lead to bad attitudes and actions and often to unfaithfulness to the Lord. While the Book of Deuteronomy is a long book, filled with a variety of material, the spiritual lesson that stands out is that we must be equipped by the Lord to face the challenges and opportunities of the future. That equipping comes from hearing His Word, cherishing it, and obeying it. While there are some things we must forget, there are also some things that we must remember if we're to please and glorify the Lord and accomplish the work He's given us to do.

From *Be Equipped* by Warren W. Wiersbe, 206–207

### Songs

“All My Work is for the Master” SASB #672

“Step by Step” SASB #42

“I'll Go in the Strength of the Lord” SASB #959

“Sanctuary” [https://youtu.be/BFe9vog\\_2GU?si=GLUveBCLdJgoqm9Z](https://youtu.be/BFe9vog_2GU?si=GLUveBCLdJgoqm9Z)

“King of Kings, Majesty” SASB #376

“He Knows My Name” SAHC #182

“I Could Sing of Your Love Forever”

<https://youtu.be/QDMH6y22sWE?si=vq98T62zbqtUnTDM>

### Responsive Scripture

**Leader:** *Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way as you came out of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 24:9 NIRV)*

**Response:** She followed baby Moses as he floated down the Nile (Exodus 2:4)

**Leader:** And later after we had left Egypt and crossed the sea.

**Response:** *Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam answered them, “Sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea.” (Exodus 15: 20-21 NIRV)*

**Leader:** Still later as we traveled in the wilderness when Miriam and Aaron spoke out against Moses because he had married a woman from Cush.

**Response:** *And they said, “Is it a fact that the Lord has spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” And the Lord heard this. (Numbers 12: 2 NIRV)*

**Leader:** *And the Lord suddenly said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, “You three go out to the tent of meeting.” So the three of them went out. (Numbers 12: 4 NIRV)*

**Response:** *And the anger of the Lord burned against them and He departed.*

**Leader:** *But when the cloud had withdrawn from above the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous.*

**Response:** *Then Aaron said to Moses, “Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not hold us responsible for this sin by which we have turned out to be foolish, and by which we have sinned. (Numbers 12: 9-11 NIRV)*

**Leader:** *So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “God, heal her, please!” (Numbers 12: 13 NIRV)*

**Response:** *So Miriam was shut outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again. (Numbers 12: 15 NIRV)*

## Prayer

### **Psalm 90: 12-17 (MSG)**

Oh! Teach us to live well!

Teach us to live wisely and well!

Come back, God—how long do we have to wait—  
and treat your servants with kindness for a change.

Surprise us with love at daybreak;

then we’ll skip and dance all the day long.

Make up for the bad times with some good times;

we’ve seen enough evil to last a lifetime.

Let your servants see what you’re best at—

the ways you rule and bless your children.

And let the loveliness of our Lord, our God, rest on us,

confirming the work that we do.

Oh, yes. Affirm the work that we do!

## Activity

*Choose a willing leader.*

Today we are going to see how well you know [leader's name]. I am going to ask a series of either-or questions. You are going to guess how [leader's name] will answer. For instance, I might say, "Chocolate ice cream or vanilla ice cream" and you will have to guess if [leader's name] likes chocolate or vanilla better. Once you have made your guess, we will let [leader's name] reveal to us the answer. It's very important that [leader's name] must pick one option even if they want both or does not really want either. Ready?

*The following is a suggestion of questions. Feel free to make up some of your own.*

Vacation in the country or vacation in the city  
Pineapple on pizza or black coffee  
Listen to a podcast or listen to music  
Comedy movie or action movie  
Cook at home or eat at a restaurant  
Night owl or Early bird  
Wear permanent clown shoes or a permanent clown nose  
Power of invisibility or power of flight  
Potato chips or corn chips  
Brass band music or guitar and keyboard music  
Spicy or sweet  
Hamburger or shawarma

Thanks to [leader's name] for your help. You might think you know someone and then they end up liking pineapple on their pizza! No matter how well we might think we know someone, they can still end up surprising us.

Moses knew his older sister, Miriam. She protected him as a baby and sang a song of praise with him after they crossed the Red Sea. It must have surprised him when she began personally attacking him. It can be hard when someone we trust hurts us.

Thankfully, God knew Moses better than anyone else. He defended Moses. God said, "*He is the most faithful person in my household. I speak with him face to face, plainly and not in riddles.*" (Numbers 12:7b-8a). We can always trust that God knows our hearts. He sees everything we do. He knows our favorite cookie, our favorite food, and most importantly he knows what is in our hearts.

## Sermon Thoughts

The last instance of remembering in Deuteronomy is different from the others. While the other events that Moses remembers in Deuteronomy concern the nation

and national events, today we focus on an individual, Miriam. This indicates the great significance of Miriam. Like Washington, Ghandi, or Booth, Miriam is a single person who elicits powerful memories. Unlike those men, Miriam was a woman who lived in a time when women seldom had any leadership roles. The prophet Micah lists her as a leader of her people along with Moses and Aaron – not under them, but along with them (Micah 6:4). Miriam was also called a “prophet,” when she led the people in worship after they crossed the Red Sea. This is a title which only 4 other women in the Bible carry (Deborah – Judges 4:4, Huldah – 2Kings 22:14, and Anna – Luke 2:36).

Miriam’s wit and leadership abilities show up early in her life. Although the Bible does not mention her name specifically in the story, she is the most logical choice for the sister who watched her baby brother, Moses, float down the river. When Moses was discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter, it was Miriam who was quick to suggest a Hebrew nurse maid - Moses’ own mother. Thanks to Miriam, Moses was partially raised by his own mother in a Hebrew household. Without these early life experiences with the Hebrews, it is doubtful that Moses would ever have the skills and knowledge necessary to lead his people.

Yet there is a dark ending to the story of Miriam. In Deuteronomy 24 Moses is recounting the various rules and regulations that he wants his people to follow -- a litany of what to eat, how to set up camp, and who to marry. He comes to regulations concerning leprosy, communicable diseases of the skin. At this point, Moses is reminded of Miriam. Unfortunately, he does not remember her as the wise prophet/leader who as a young girl saved his life. He remembers her later in life when she became a foolish troublemaker and God struck her with leprosy. In an instant, her skin became white and was decaying on her body. She was forced from the camp and into the lonely wilderness. Even after her return, she is never recorded as singing to the Lord again. She ends up dying in the wilderness and never sees the promised land of God. Moses says, “*Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt.*” (Deuteronomy 24:9)

While modern readers might be tempted to reduce the lesson of this passage in Deuteronomy to the treatment of leprosy (if you get leprosy stay away from people), we should not ignore Miriam’s story. Chances are everyone knows someone like Miriam – saints of God who allowed temptation, bitterness, jealousy, and divisiveness to overtake them. As a result, their wisdom was clouded, their joy was taken, and they either walked away from the church or became a form of disease that spread to others in the church.

A few years ago, I called another officer to let her know that I was mailing a card to the corps for the family of a retired officer who had passed away. I recounted the impact this woman had on my life. She was the embodiment of joy. She encouraged Paul and I before we entered training and even took to introducing us as “her cadets,” which always made us feel simultaneously humbled and proud. She and I

had attended the same university, though many years apart, and she always asked for my finals schedule so she could pray specifically for the final exams that I was taking on the day I was taking them. In fact, we often had wonderful talks about the Drake Bulldogs basketball team. She was their biggest fan. As I ended my recollections, there was a strange silence at the other end of the phone. For a moment, I almost thought that the other officer had hung up. Then she sighed and said, "Thank You. It's nice to know that she was not always the person that I knew. Frankly, I was struggling to come up with enough good and kind things to fill up a 10-minute eulogy." The dear lovely saint I had known had completely changed. Like Miriam, she had lost her joy and strength.

What happened to Miriam? She was consumed by jealousy. The first verse of Numbers 12 says, "*Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite.*" Miriam was the tambourine playing prophetess, along with her brothers, Moses and Aaron, she was a leader of the people. It is likely that she felt threatened by the wife of Moses who the people might also have regarded as a leader. There's a reason why "You shall not covet" made it into the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:17). **Jealousy can steal our energy and destroy a sense of community.** As soon as we begin to feel envy when others succeed rather than joy, we head down a short road to misery and we fail to thank God for his abundant blessing and provision because we are focusing on what we do not have rather than on what God has given us.

Instead of being thankful that God provided another female leader to the Israelites, Miriam wanted all the responsibility and hassle of leadership for herself. She could not stand the thought that someone else might be able to play a tambourine or sing a song to Jesus. In a camp of over a million people, there was certainly a lot to do and many people to care for, but Miriam chose to look on another leader as a threat. Jealousy will cloud our judgment. It will make us work twice as hard and our pride will quickly kill us unless we hold it in check.

Speaking of cloudy judgment, it is quite possible that Miriam was a racist. The Cushite wife of Moses was a foreigner. She was different from the Hebrew people. Notice that in Numbers 12, the only description of the wife of Moses provided is her race which is mentioned twice in the first verse. This indicates that it was the primary reason for the complaints of Aaron and Miriam. **Prejudicial and judgmental attitudes will crush our spirit.** Not only will they crush an individual's spirit, but such attitudes often spread like cancer. They either infect others or repulse others.

One of the top reasons people give for not being a part of organized religion is their perception that people who go to church are too judgmental. No one wants to be part of a church which is more interested in passing judgment than loving folks into God's kingdom.

We are called to go out into the world and to look on people as God looks at them, at their hearts. Moreover, we are called to be reconcilers in the world, to go

out into our communities and neighborhoods with the reconciling love of Jesus Christ. While this sounds like an impossible task, one of the underlying themes of Deuteronomy is remembering to rely on God's power, God's movement, and God's mission. We must open our minds to the God possibilities in this world.

Which brings us to the final issue with Miriam: she believed her station as a prophetess and sister of Moses allowed her a position of power and privilege. She and Aaron ask in Numbers 12:2 "*Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?*" they asked. "*Hasn't he also spoken through us?*" They believed that since God had spoken through them, they had the right to say whatever they pleased. For them prophesying was no longer about what Holy Spirit was saying, it was about what they wanted Holy Spirit to say. They decided to use their position of power and privilege as a substitution for God's voice, direction, and leading.

**There is a great danger in assuming that we know what God is saying without listening.** Miriams often manifest themselves as well-meaning folks who believe that God cannot possibly surprise them. The sea has already been parted. The 10 Commandments given. The manna has come down. God must be done. They are pleased with the idea of a god who has neatly defined borders and fits into their small-minded ideologies.

There is an old joke about a man who ordered an expensive suit for a banquet, and the tailor finished the alterations just in time. But as the man left the shop, a sudden rainstorm doused the jacket and shrank one of the sleeves. "We can't do anything about it today," the tailor explained when the man returned to the shop. "Just stretch the sleeve over your hand, and no one will notice."

With his arm contorted, the man left the shop and again was doused by rain. This time, one of the pant legs shrank. "I can't take care of that now!" exclaimed the tailor. "Pull the bottom of your pants over your heel, and nobody will notice."

His body twisted the man once again left the shop. Two women were passing by, "That poor man!" said one. "I wonder what is wrong with him."

"I don't know," said the other, "But he sure is wearing a nice suit."

We must abandon the legacy of Miriam and her ill-fitted suit of jealousy, prejudice, and small-mindedness. **In the words of Hebrews 12:1, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles."** If our faith has any hope of sustaining for the next generation, we must be clothed with love (Colossians 3:14) and wear the holiness and righteousness that God has provided.

### Benediction

Remember who you are.

You are of God. Made in His image.

Loved from the depths of God's unfathomable Father's heart.

Treasured beyond imagination.

From *Forgiving What You Can't Forget* by Lysa Terkeurst