



Jan/Feb 2025

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

**BREAKING BARRIERS,  
BUILDING BRIDGES**

**ALSO: REMEMBERING IN DEUTERONOMY**

Dear Friends:

Do you ever read from the Old Testament in the Bible and wonder what it means for your life today? Some parts of the Old Testament can be hard to understand.

This month Pastor Denise Posie explores the theme of “remembering” while reflecting on passages in the book of Deuteronomy. At the center of this exercise is remembering God’s covenant promises to be Israel’s God and for Israel to be his people. Through his mighty acts and miracles as well as his covenant law, God showed them and the surrounding nations what it means to live in fellowship with the Creator of the universe. Seeing God’s greatness, love, and mercy as he leads his people can deepen our own spiritual understanding as well.

In February, Pastor Stan Kruijs, who served as a missionary in Asia, reflects on some of the barriers that exist in presenting the good news of Jesus Christ to various people groups—and particularly to those who have never heard about Jesus. Exploring these challenges can also deepen our understanding of God’s amazing grace and our calling to share the good news of Jesus with the people around us.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God’s Word!



Kurt Selles



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**“Remembering in  
Deuteronomy”  
Denise Posie**



**“Breaking Barriers,  
Building Bridges”  
Stan Kruis**

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TODAY (USPS 185-140),  
Volume 75, Number 1,  
published bimonthly by  
ReFrame Ministries, formerly  
Back to God Ministries  
International, at 1700 28th  
Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI  
49508-1407. Periodicals postage  
paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan,  
and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes  
to Today, 1700 28th Street SE,  
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407.

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Ministries**

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Back to God Ministries International

# january

## Remembering in Deuteronomy

**Denise Posie**

I recently grew interested in the theme of “remembering” in the Bible, and that led me to the book of Deuteronomy, which is now one of my favorite Old Testament books. God is surprisingly great, present, and intentional in the story of his love for his people as he prepares to bring them into the land he has promised them.

Deuteronomy emphasizes God’s covenant promises, God’s law (including the Ten Commandments), the people’s history and their witness to other nations, and more. According to pastor and author Tim Keller, it was God’s desire for other nations to see God’s people and say, “What a glorious God they have!” Similarly, God’s Son, Jesus, prayed that all who believe in him “may be one,” reflecting the unity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, “so that the world may believe” Jesus came to bring them God’s salvation and full life in his kingdom (John 17:20-21). Through Deuteronomy we can learn important life lessons about being God’s witnesses in a broken world today.

*Denise Posie served as a pastor in an urban church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, for thirteen years. She also served the Christian Reformed Church in North America as a congregational consultant and as director of leadership diversity. Since retiring in 2020, she has served part-time at Calvin Theological Seminary as a pastor in redemptive kingdom diversity, and in her spare time she enjoys writing and meeting new people.*

**MAKE US READY TO RECEIVE!**

*“See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land the LORD swore he would give to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and to their descendants after them.”*  
—Deuteronomy 1:8

Every new year brings new opportunities and challenges. May the Lord prepare us to receive something new this year to improve our lives.

Many people begin the year by making New Year’s resolutions and promises, but that approach rarely works well. To receive from God, we must believe that he has prepared something for us. We need to dismiss thoughts of not being worthy or deserving of God’s blessings. We may imagine and speculate what God will do for us, but we do not really know (see 1 Corinthians 2:9).

To receive from God, we must believe he will do as he says. We cannot lean into our own understanding or dwell too much on the past because we might miss seeing God’s hand at work (Isaiah 43:19). When

God nudges us forward, we cannot allow fear to keep us in our comfort zone or be satisfied with our current situation. We cannot talk ourselves out of what God wants to do.

Let us remember our history with God and be ready to receive. We can trust him and respond in obedience. We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us receive God’s blessings in this new year. God wants us to step out and receive the blessings he has in store for us.

Gracious God, as we begin this new year, we want to be ready for whatever you have prepared. Awaken us each day to the newness of life in you. Amen.

## LIGHTENING OUR BURDENS

*At that time I said to you, "You are too heavy a burden for me to carry alone."*  
—Deuteronomy 1:9

Moses, the leader of God's people during their long time of wandering in the desert, learned that he could not carry the heavy burdens of the people on his own. The Israelites had grown in number. Bearing their problems, burdens, and disputes was too much for one person to handle. So he shared the workload with other leaders from among the twelve tribes of Israel, and they developed a system that worked for everyone. (See also Exodus 18.)

New challenges are a part of life, and we cannot keep doing what we are used to if it no longer works. We can talk to a pastor, family members, close friends, or other trusted persons when our burdens are too much for us—emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Many of us today face an overload of situations that are caus-

ing anxiety in our lives: family concerns, financial troubles, broken relationships, work dissatisfaction, career pressures, societal issues. Struggling on our own is not healthy, and eventually we need help. The Lord wants us to share one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

As followers of Jesus, we can make the right choice by lightening our burdens. Jesus invites us to receive rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28-30). We don't have to carry our burdens alone. We can give them to the Lord.

Lord Jesus, thank you for bearing our burdens. We are not alone. You have given us people who love and care for us. Help us to find rest for our souls and strength to carry on. Amen.

## TRUST, FOLLOW, AND STEP OUT IN FAITH

*“See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”*

—Deuteronomy 1:21

One morning, while looking out my kitchen window, I observed my neighbor's two sons, ages 8 and 10, playing in their backyard. The older boy jumped across a gap from one wooden landscape log to another. He tried again and fell, but he got back up. With his brother watching, he looked back at how far he had jumped. He paused. I imagined he needed the courage to make another jump. He jumped again and landed safely on the log again.

Moses reminded God's people of their history. God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness, and given them victory over other nations. They were assured of God's guidance and protection in preparation for entering the promised land. They did not

need to fear what was ahead of them, even though there were reports of powerful enemies and even giant warriors in the land. God would go before them and fight their battles.

We too may need a reminder of our past failures and victories in order to have the courage to follow God. His faithfulness will propel us into our future. We can look back and see what God has already done. God has a plan already marked out for us, so we can trust, follow, and step out in faith.

Almighty God, give me the courage to trust and follow you, even when I cannot see my way forward. My past, present, and future are in your hands; you will always go before me. Amen.

**CARRIED ALL THE WAY!**

*“ . . . In the wilderness . . . you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.”*  
—Deuteronomy 1:31

The picture of a father gently carrying his son is an image of God's love, power, and protection extended to us as his children. When we cannot go any further, we are drained of our desire to keep going. We feel beat up by life's circumstances and don't want to show up anymore.

I remember watching a replay of the 1992 Olympics men's 400-meter semifinals in Barcelona when British runner Jim Redmond injured his leg. The announcer said, "He's out!" Redmond was in pain and couldn't run, but he hopped on one foot, heading for the finish line. The crowd cheered because he didn't stop. He wouldn't let anyone help him until his dad ran out onto the course and wrapped his arms around him. Redmond's dad wore a cap that said, "Just Do It." But Redmond's pain

was too intense, and he cried. Yet the crowd never stopped cheering. The father held his son until he made it to the finish line.

When we're running our race in life and can't see our way through, our heavenly Father will gently carry us all the way. There's no reason to feel shame or guilt. We cannot "just do it." God will carry us through the wilderness. God is always with us, wherever we are, and he promises us that we will make it through.

Heavenly Father, thank you for carrying me when I can't "just do it." I leave my shame and my guilt at Jesus' feet. In your powerful name, Lord, and by your Spirit, Amen.

## THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS

*The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness.*  
—Deuteronomy 2:7

We can be encouraged because God will bless all the work of our hands, whether we earn an income, raise a family, maintain a household, volunteer to help immigrants or youth, serve the church, or serve our community. God is the source of all our blessings and the work given to us. Our work is for his glory. And we know we can work to our fullest because God will bless all the work of our hands.

God wants us to work, and he wants to bless our work. When we think we are not qualified or capable of doing our work, God will provide for our needs. We can cast aside negative thoughts and do the work God has called us to do. God has provided our work for us—whatever it may be—and we can work at it “with all [our] heart, as working for the Lord”; he is our true and loving

Master, not a human master (Colossians 3:23). Whatever gifts God has given us to work with can open doors to new and unexpected opportunities for blessings. We will bear fruit, and the blessings will multiply.

During their long time in the wilderness, the Israelites worked with their hands, following God’s direction, and God blessed them. They had everything they needed because God provided, and they worked to honor him. God gave them enough for themselves and some to give away. God desires for us to flourish!

Loving God, thank you for all your blessings. If we are discouraged in our work, remind us that we work for you. Amen.

## STRENGTH AND COURAGE

*“Do not be afraid of them; the LORD your God himself will fight for you.”*  
—Deuteronomy 3:22

I do not know of anyone who has not been afraid of something or someone at some time in their life. Have you experienced the fear of a medical diagnosis, or of being harmed, or of being threatened by someone in authority, or of moving from a place of comfort and safety to a place that could be unwelcoming or even dangerous? Have you feared growing old, or being alone in old age, or perhaps losing your abilities or something you have worked for? Have you been afraid of losing loved ones or even your own life?

When we are afraid, it can be helpful to recall times when God demonstrated his love, care, and power. We can trust in the Lord, who is faithful. We do not have to be afraid (Psalm 27:1).

Moses faced his own fears when hostile kings and their

armies threatened the people of Israel (see Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11). But God told him not to be afraid because God would defeat their enemies. God told Moses to encourage and strengthen Joshua so that he too would trust God and not rely on his own abilities or be afraid of other nations as they crossed the Jordan River.

We can face our fears on our own, or we can listen to God. We should obey when the Spirit nudges or tells us to be still. God has our back. He will give us strength and courage to stand. The Lord is always with us and will always take care of us.

Thank you, Lord, that I do not have to face my fears alone. I will trust you to give me strength and courage to stand. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## OUR GOD IS NEAR

*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?*

—Deuteronomy 4:7

Sitting at home near a side window, I heard my little neighbor Simeon say, “Come on, Daddy.” His father was rolling a brand-new bicycle out of the garage into the driveway. Simeon had his helmet and knee pads on. He carefully got on his new bike. As Simeon’s little feet paddled away, his dad stretched out his arms to hold on to the handlebars. Simeon laughed as he steered the bike carefully down the driveway with his dad right at his side. Father and son went up and down the driveway several times.

At one point, I heard Simeon cry. His father wanted him to try riding on his own, but Simeon didn’t like that idea. He continued to cry. Finally his dad said, “Simeon, I’ll be right here with you.” He gave his son what he needed, assuring him that he would not be

alone. Simeon wiped away his tears. He looked straight ahead and rode without his dad holding on to the handlebars.

There is no god like our God! We do not have to go to a specific place to meet him. He is right there with us. We are always within God’s reach. He hears us when we call and cry out (Psalm 18:6), and he always cares for us.

Eternal God, thank you for always being close by. Even when it may seem that you are not there, you are. You are our ever-present help in times of need. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## MEMORIES OF GOD'S GOODNESS

*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.*

—Deuteronomy 4:9

Many of us have beautiful memories and stories of our parents, siblings, pastors, teachers, or neighbors showing their love and care for us, and we will never forget what they have done for us. Many of us also share these stories with our children, friends, coworkers, and others. These stories will always be part of our personal history.

Similarly, as believers in God, we remember stories of God's deliverance, grace, protection, and greatness shown to us. Memories of our spiritual formation and personal blessings give us encouragement and strength.

We would not be who we are without God and what he has done in our lives. And when we remember and tell our stories, God receives the glory. Our faith is strengthened and

renewed. When we tell others, especially the next generations, we share with them our love for and dependence on the Lord.

We can find many ways to remember. Some of us may use daily or weekly journaling, daily times of reflection with prayer, pictures, artwork, and music that remind us of significant times and places where we have encountered God in our lives. Some families and churches also designate times to tell stories about the Spirit's work in their lives.

What are some ways you remember God's goodness?

Almighty God, your goodness is too good to forget. By your Spirit, lead me to tell of your faithfulness and love to all generations. Amen.

## NEVER ABANDONED

*The LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath.* —Deuteronomy 4:31

Angela was a new Christian. She repeatedly asked her Bible-study teacher, Mrs. Green, how she would know that God was there for her.

Angela was in her teens and was having a difficult time since her parents' divorce. She and her mother had moved 700 miles away, and she saw her father only once a year.

At one point, Angela's mother had some financial challenges. So Angela had to go and move in with her father and his new family. She felt that she had to be good, or God would leave her. Angela never told her mother about her abandonment issues.

Angela felt encouraged, however, whenever she talked with her Bible-study teacher. Mrs. Green told her that she was God's beloved daughter and that God would never leave

her. God does not abandon his children. He loves us, and we belong to him. He is always with us, no matter where we find ourselves. Nothing can separate us from God's love and presence (Romans 8:38-39). God can be trusted.

Angela wanted to grow in her faith journey. Mrs. Green encouraged her with God's truth. Angela learned that God's promises are not based on our thoughts or feelings. God is faithful to his word. Mrs. Green said, "Angela, pray, read the Bible, and believe God's words. He will not abandon you. Even when you might not think so, he is there." And Angela believed.

Lord, help me always to believe you are with me, even if I do not feel your presence. Amen.

## IN AWE OF GOD

*You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other.*

—Deuteronomy 4:35

I live close to Lake Michigan on the South Haven, Michigan, side. It is my favorite go-to place; sometimes I am drawn to Lake Michigan to experience God's greatness. As I stand on the shore, I sing, "How Great Is Our God," "How Great Thou Art," "In Christ Alone," and "He Is Lord." These songs are like stories that remind me who God is.

As I listen to the sounds of big waves crashing on rocks, seagulls squawking, and wind roaring, I proclaim that the God of wonders is holy. He is the Lord of heaven above and earth below. Gazing at the vastness of the sky and the lake, both perfectly blue, I am awe-struck and speechless. It seems as if God's finger has blended the line where the lake meets the sky; it appears seamless.

God is present and actively working in our lives. He wants us to know that he is the Lord our God—in the past, present, and future. We praise God for letting us know him through his words, nature, works, and especially through his Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Where or when are you drawn into the awesomeness of God and reminded that the Lord is God and there is no other?

O God of wonders, I am in awe of you. I praise you that you are God and there is no other. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

## AN EVER-READY HEART

*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.*  
—Deuteronomy 6:6

Unlike the commandments written by God on two stone tablets that Moses delivered to the people, God's Word is written on our hearts today. It accomplishes what it is intended to do (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10). And because the Word of God is in our minds and written on our hearts, we are able to obey it through the work and power of the Holy Spirit in us.

When I was a child, my parents got lots of Eveready® batteries for our new toys at Christmastime. I remember a TV commercial about Eveready® batteries that was funny and entertaining. The battery was described as putting more life into your life all day and all night.

When God's Word is on our hearts, it puts more life into our lives. God's Word is alive, active, and sharp, and it pene-

trates deeply. It judges the attitude of the heart. It exposes what is in the heart (Hebrews 4:12-13). The Word of God makes us come alive. It guides, comforts, nourishes, convicts, and teaches us how to live in a broken world.

Jesus Christ, the Word in the beginning who later lived among us (John 1:1-5, 14), came into the world to bring the light of abundant, eternal life for all people. When we hold fast to the Word of life, our light shines for the world to see his light in us. God's Word puts life into our lives.

Thank you, Lord, for the power of your Word. Help me to have an ever-ready heart to respond to your Word and be filled with your life. Amen.

## FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM

*Be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.* —Deuteronomy 6:12

On a weekday morning, Sara drove to the grocery store a few miles from her home. She was feeling good and listening to a Christian music station on the radio. She began to sing when one of her favorite songs came on: "When I Think about the Lord." Suddenly tears began rolling down her cheeks, and she pulled the car over to the roadside. Sara was rejoicing with tears of joy as she remembered what God had done in her life.

Sara was a growing follower of Jesus, but at that time she had begun going out again with old friends who were still living in the fast lane. She had not been careful in remembering what God had done for her. God had brought her out of a lifestyle she did not want to return to. The song on the radio that day reminded Sara that God had turned her life around. He

had freed Sara from her old life of sin.

Sara's new life was essential to her and her family. She was filled with the Spirit, and God had a plan for her life. She wanted to stay focused and continue taking online courses to earn a bachelor's degree and serve God with her life.

A favorite song, Bible passage, or spiritual encounter can help us get back on track when we remember our deliverance from bondage to freedom in the Lord our God, who saves us through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Sovereign God, thank you for setting me free in Jesus. Help me to share the hope of life in you with people who are trapped in sin and need the freedom you offer. In Jesus, Amen.

## JUST BECAUSE

*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. . . .*

—Deuteronomy 7:8

In the past I have received beautiful bouquets of colorful flowers from family members, friends, and colleagues with an attached note: “Just because,” signed with the person’s name. No matter how I might be feeling, those expressions of love always make me smile.

God chose the Israelites “just because.” God faithfully kept his promises to their ancestors, bringing Israel out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land. God smiled and set his love on them.

God’s love is not dependent on how much we love him. Although sometimes we might think so, no person can earn God’s love or try to convince God to love them. Though we should love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, God’s love is not based on

who we are, our performance, societal status, or anything else. We are enough just the way we are. And God is all that we need. He will provide for all our needs (Philippians 4:19).

It is “just because” God “so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And we can receive his love “just because.”

Lord and Savior, thank you for your love “just because.” Help me to remember that I cannot earn your love but am nevertheless loved by you in Christ. And that is abundantly more than enough. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## A COVENANT OF LOVE

*Know . . . 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 7:9

Our God is love, and he loves us. God cares, protects, and provides for us. God described himself to Moses as “the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7). God’s love is sure, extravagant, dynamic, radical, and eternal. Nothing is better than knowing we are loved by God.

It is lovely to start each day knowing we are loved by God and to think of his love throughout the day, no matter what comes our way. Love anchors us. Experiencing God’s love has an extraordinary effect on how we relate to others. Love gives us a testimony to share with others.

The way we treat one another comes from God’s love in us. The Spirit of God guides us to be patient and kind, not boastful, not dishonoring others, not self-seeking, not easily angered, not keeping a list of wrongs. Love “rejoices with the truth . . . always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13).

God loves us even as he loves his own Son. Love is forever. Where are you experiencing God’s great love in your life?

Gracious God, thank you for your covenant of love and for sending Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins as a sacrifice of love. I desire to love and live for you. Amen.

## SATISFYING OUR HUNGER

*He . . . [fed] you with manna . . . to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*  
—Deuteronomy 8:3

When I was a little girl, my family often visited the small Polish community of Hamtramck, near Detroit, on Saturdays. We kept our windows down on a nice sunny day while looking for a good parking space. The wonderful aroma of freshly baked bread filled the air. Bread is delicious, filling, and nutritious, but not enough to sustain our body, mind, soul, and spirit.

While the Israelites were in the wilderness for forty years, they were hungry for physical food. God fed them manna from heaven daily to teach them that people do not live “on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” Manna was unlike anything the people had eaten before.

Many years later, when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days, he was hungry

also. The devil tempted him to tell a stone to become bread. But Jesus answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone’” (Luke 4:4).

How can we put a good plan in place for renewal and restoration in life? We can satisfy our hunger by reading the Bible daily, worshiping the Lord with his people each week, and also meeting for a weekly study to grow in knowledge and understanding. We might also find that we need more of the Word at different times of the day.

Ask God’s Spirit to guide you, and grow!

Lord, guide us to read and meditate on your Word, growing in the grace, knowledge, and love of Jesus. Amen.

## THE ABUNDANT LIFE

*When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. —Deuteronomy 8:10*

Abundance with God means that grace is extended in unexpected and unforeseen ways from the One who can do far beyond what we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). God gives us tangible blessings: deliverance, family, food, health, finances, work assignments and callings, and much more. And all of this is by God's favor, not based on our own merits. God's goodness is worked out in our lives; therefore we lift our voices in praise from a heart of gratitude, privately or publicly and individually or collectively.

God warns, though, "Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God. . . ." Sadly, that happened often in Israel, and at times God had to punish the people and call them to repentance. When they did, God forgave them and showered them abundantly again.

We have even more abundance in Jesus Christ, our Savior, because he came to give us life "to the full" (John 10:10). The abundant life is more than material things. It is life that is filled to overflowing with the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). We reflect Jesus as his witnesses in this world.

The world needs to see his reflection in us face-to-face, in online meetings, on social media, and wherever we go.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, help us to receive, remember, and praise you for your abundance. May our lives reflect your grace shared in abundance through Jesus daily. Amen.

## FERVENT, UNCEASING PRAYER

*I had stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, as I did the first time, and the LORD listened to me at this time also. It was not his will to destroy you.* —Deuteronomy 10:10

Moses explains here that when he received the commands of God on tablets of stone, he prayed fervently for the people. This was the second time he had gone up on the mountain to receive God's law, because the people had sinned while he was away the first time. The people had sinned so badly that God threatened to destroy them, but Moses interceded for them, and God heard Moses' prayers and sent the people on their way. (See also Deuteronomy 9:7-29.)

When our hearts are troubled and seeking God's grace on behalf of our churches, families, coworkers, partners, and other hurting or lost souls, we pray. It is powerful to pray and to be prayed for persistently. We pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is not unusual for people to intercede for others who are

in need, such as homeless, sick, hungry, or displaced individuals. Even more, we can pray for people to repent and be forgiven. We count on God to move mightily in people's lives and situations because we know God loves them.

James 5:16 assures us that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. God listens to us, and Jesus, the Savior, faithfully intercedes for us (Romans 8:34). Amazing!

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit thank you for calling me to intercede for people and situations in our broken world. Help me to pray faithfully, as Jesus himself does. In his name, Amen.

## FEAR THE LORD

*What does the LORD . . . ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve [him] . . . with all your heart and . . . soul . . . ? —Deuteronomy 10:12*

As a child, I was afraid of God because I did not understand what it means to “fear the Lord.”

My love for God wasn’t supposed to scare me because God perfects love in us to drive out fear (1 John 4:18).

The word *fear* is used in the Bible mainly to convey that we should revere and honor God because of who he is—his holiness, majesty, purity, and perfection—recognizing that God is good and righteous in all his ways and in all that he does. The fear of the Lord expresses our awareness of God’s presence in our life. It affects every area of our life, our communion with him, our behavior, and our relationships. There are things we are less likely to do because we fear the Lord, not because we are afraid of what God might do,

but because we love, respect, and honor him. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

We understand that God is infinite and we are finite. God is the Creator, and we are part of his creation. God is great and mighty in power, and his understanding is unlimited (Psalm 147:5). His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). God is gracious and merciful to us, and he is worthy of all respect and honor.

Almighty God, I revere and honor you with all my heart and all my soul, now and always. In Jesus, Amen.

## WALK IN OBEDIENCE

*What does the LORD . . . ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve [him] . . . with all your heart and . . . soul . . . ? —Deuteronomy 10:12*

Each day brings challenges to walk in obedience to God.

Sometimes we get off track following friends headed in the wrong direction. We can have strong desires for material possessions, popularity, and behaviors that do not please the Lord. We might fear what others think or say and stop following the Lord. These are only a few ways in which we struggle to obey God and stay on the path he has marked out for us. Under some circumstances, we do not resist wrong desires and overwhelming fears; they distract us, consciously and unconsciously.

God calls us, however, to live in ways that honor him and align with his Word. With the Holy Spirit's help, we can live an obedient life as we follow Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Jesus is our example.

He remained obedient even as he died on the cross for our sake.

What should we do with distractions that tempt us to disobey God's Word? We can stay close to the Lord by asking the Holy Spirit to help and strengthen us. We can take captive our sinful thoughts and desires (2 Corinthians 10:5). We can anchor ourselves in the Lord so that we are not easily swayed by our sinful nature. We can delight in the Scriptures and meditate on God's Word.

Lord, I want to walk in obedience. Give me the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to faithfully follow Jesus with all my heart and with all my soul. Amen.

## LOVE THE LORD

*What does the LORD . . . ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve [him] . . . with all your heart and . . . soul . . . ? —Deuteronomy 10:12*

It seems so natural to love God because he first loved me (John 13:34; 1 John 4:19). But I remember when I didn't love God with all my heart and soul. In that way each one of us is like the ancient Israelites. There are people, things, and situations that compete for our love and attention. They often start subtly and cause our love for God to shift, fluctuate, and fragment.

Our love for God is a response to his love for us. Obedience is an excellent indicator of our love. Jesus told his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commands" (John 14:15). Love for God and obedience to God are inseparable. We know that loving God goes beyond words. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we follow the Lord by leaving our old life behind. Life is no longer all about us but about

our love relationship with the Lord.

We deepen our love by getting to know God's character, who he is, his ways, and what he does. We do this by reading the Bible, observing God's presence in our lives, and being around people who love him.

I remember when Deacon John and Claire invited me for a meal at their home. John was a quiet, stoic type. Before he prayed, he read aloud from the book of Psalms. Tears came to his eyes as he read about God and his goodness. Love comes from a heart of gratitude.

Loving Father, I love you and want to love you with all my heart and soul. Thank you for your love. In Jesus, Amen.

## SERVE THE LORD

*What does the LORD . . . ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve [him] . . . with all your heart and . . . soul . . . ? —Deuteronomy 10:12*

There are many examples of servanthood. The best model is Jesus. He showed his disciples how to serve one another by washing their feet. On the night before he died, he took a towel and a bowl of water and assumed the role of a servant (John 13:1-17). In that way Jesus showed his disciples love and humility. He cared about how they related to one another. He cared about the example that they would set for others. He called them to serve others just as he came to serve.

We are called to serve with all our heart and soul and without judging, showing discrimination, or expecting payback. God blesses humility, compassion, righteousness, and pure motives. He cares about how we relate to each other. And we all need help in learning how to serve.

No matter where we serve, we can reflect Jesus' character and act as an example to the world. The song "Make Me a Servant" is a beautiful prayer and vision of being called to serve with all our heart and soul for our witness in the world and for God's glory:

Make me a servant, humble  
and meek.

Lord, let me lift up those  
who are weak.

And may the prayer of my  
heart always be . . .

Make me a servant today.

Lord, strengthen me to  
serve you with all my  
heart and all my soul for  
your glory and to be a  
witness in this world. For  
Jesus' sake, Amen.

## BE VICTORIOUS!

*... observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good . . .* —Deuteronomy 10:13

Think about the many things you may not have wanted to do or liked to do, but you did them anyway because it was for your own good. Growing up, you might have had a long list of undesirable things that your parents asked you to do. And maybe you heard them say, "You'll be glad you did this." I ate my vegetables because my mom said they were good for me.

We don't always want to do what God says is good for us. It can be difficult to engage in some things that God asks us to do, but they are in our best interest. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). We are called to put up with one another and forgive if we have a grievance with someone (Colossians 3:13). We put off the old self and put on the new self to be like the

Lord in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24). These commands can be really complicated.

God's Word is more than a list of rules. We believe what God asks of us in his Word. We don't have to face these complicated teachings on our own. We have the help of the Holy Spirit and the community of God's people. God's love and example motivate us to be victorious, even when that can be difficult!

Righteous God, help me always to do what is right, that I may glorify you. May your love motivate me to be victorious. In Jesus, Amen.

## GOD'S TREASURED POSSESSION

*You are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.*  
—Deuteronomy 14:2

Where do we fit in the world? Sometimes our circumstances may cause us to wonder where we belong and why we are here. We may find ourselves in situations where people try to define us based on their own life experiences or what they have observed in us. We can become confused because we do not have a clear sense of purpose or meaning in life.

Though Deuteronomy 14:2 refers to the ancient Israelites, we know that in Christ we are God's treasured possession today. We are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). We were once lost, but we have been called by God himself.

Knowing who has chosen us and whom we belong to makes a difference in our lives. It shows up in our worship. As God's treasured possession, we worship him. We declare his praises in our hearts, in the presence of others, and in public worship. As we mature in Christ, we grow to worship him with all our heart and soul, our innermost being. And this is reflected outwardly as we share our faith with others. As the Lord's church, we "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19-20). God is building his kingdom through the work of his chosen people.

Father, thank you for making us your treasured possession. Help each of us as your children to live a life worthy of our calling. In Jesus, Amen.

## THE SECRET THINGS OF GOD

*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.* —Deuteronomy 29:29

As we read and reflect on this passage about God's covenant and what he has revealed to his people, we understand that we don't know everything. God has chosen not to reveal everything to us. We do not have access to all things.

We can think of many reasons why God does not tell us everything. He is God, after all, the one who created us. As his creatures, we cannot be God. His thoughts and ways are not ours, and they are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). God calls us to have faith in him, and our faith can grow deeper when we do not understand God's ways and thoughts. As believers, we learn to trust his guidance.

The Spirit opens our minds to understand things about God. As believers, we are blessed abundantly because the Spirit

of God comes to live within us. "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God . . . no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). We can trust the Spirit to teach us what we need to know, and we can trust that the Lord, who knows all things, will keep us in his care and will always keep his promises.

Spirit of God, thank you for helping us understand what has been revealed to us. Help us to be at peace in knowing that we do not know everything but that you know all things. Amen.

**REFRESHED BY READING ALOUD!**

*“Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.”*

—Deuteronomy 31:12

Years ago, on a mission trip to Nassau in the Bahamas, I saw a man holding a Bible and speaking at a podium in a downtown marketplace. Several other people stood there too, and folding chairs were set out.

I walked over to see what they were doing. They were hosting a marathon of the public reading of Scripture, a 24-hour nonstop event. During that day I returned twice and was invited to read each time. For me, it was an incredible experience of reading God’s Word.

The apostle Paul urged Timothy to devote himself to “the public reading of Scripture” along with preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 4:13). I found that this often-overlooked spiritual exercise allowed me to hear God’s Word afresh, with various voices reading and without

commentary. We were able to read and listen with others in the community.

Hearing and learning the Bible together is a good spiritual practice for people of all ages. Life can be busy and full. We all need to hear and engage with God’s Word, which has so much to teach about God and his love for us, and how we can shine the light of God’s love into the darkness of this world. In what ways can you participate in reading Scripture in order to share God’s Word with others?

Lord, thank you for the public reading of Scripture. By your Word, may we grow in faith and glorify your name. Amen.

## TRAILS OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

*Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.*  
—Deuteronomy 32:7

Whether we are young or old, new to faith in God or lifelong believers, we can be inspired by the trails of God's faithfulness in long-past generations. Those generations may include our families, churches, communities, and various peoples around the world. They can reach back to our spiritual ancestors in the Bible. Evidence of God's faithfulness has always been with us. We may recall past stories of joy and pain, gain and loss, light and darkness. We may also write books and articles, set up memorials, make movies, have family reunions, and celebrate anniversaries to mark our history. All of these can help us grow to know God, ourselves, and others.

God wants us to keep our long past in view so that we can understand our present. Learning about our history

helps us to acknowledge what God has done for us and to look ahead in hope, trusting that God's goodness will follow us always.

With God's help, we will remember, tell, and explain our story to others who have not heard about the Lord. May the Spirit unite us for intergenerational conversations with our family members, neighbors, friends, and others in our church, school, and other community settings. May we have the humility to listen and share so that we can see and tell of God's faithfulness to all generations.

*"O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come," help us share and learn about your loving care always. Amen.*

## HONEY FROM THE ROCK

*He . . . fed [his people] with the fruit of the fields. He nourished [them] with honey from the rock. . . . —Deuteronomy 32:13*

We will never be satisfied with anything in life unless we have God, the Rock, who provides for all our needs.

In many ways, life is like a wilderness—especially when we are dealing with loss, sickness, unmet dreams, and other kinds of challenging circumstances. We are hungry, afraid, lonely, empty, and without hope in the wilderness. We search in vain for ways to satisfy our needs. Some people think their situation would be better if they were single, or married; if they had children, or no children; or if they had a different career, went to a better school, lived in a different place, and so on. We look for provisions and satisfaction in the wrong places.

Though life has its challenges, God reveals himself and gives us what we need to endure. The honey we receive from

the Rock is sweet to the soul. It heals, sustains, and comforts. Sometimes it works beyond our understanding. Even when things fall apart all around us, we can say, “It is well with my soul.” We can keep saying, “God is good. All the time.”

We know we cannot make it in life without the Rock. We know where our help comes from (see Psalm 121). When we “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8), we are always blessed in the wilderness of life. God is right there with us.

Help me, Lord, to remember that honey from the Rock keeps my soul alive and well. You are the Rock in the weary land of life. Thank you for always being there. In Jesus, Amen.

## THE LAST WORD

*"They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long. . . ."*  
—Deuteronomy 32:47

We assembled in the seminary chapel for "The Last Word," a sermon from a retiring professor. The professor preached as if it were his last sermon. It was what we needed to hear to live faithful lives in Christ. Similarly, Moses' "last words" to God's people Israel were not just idle words; they were life.

God's words enable us to live in the world as his children, not as children of the world. They are active and living words that give life to our entire being. We learn who we are and what God requires of us.

God's words nourish our souls, transform and renew our minds, and strengthen our hearts. Living words build our faith and give us wisdom for making godly decisions. They open our eyes to good and evil in the world. They lead us in paths of righteousness.

God's words teach us about him and play a vital role in welcoming his presence and worshiping him. God's words ignite a fire in us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31).

The power of God's words convicts us to ask for forgiveness and receive it from others.

When we pray, we converse with the living Word.

We are blessed to hear and keep God's Word.

Heavenly Father, help us to proclaim the power of your Word. Your words are not idle words. They are life. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

## CALLED TO BE A COMMUNITY OF BLESSING

*This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death.* —Deuteronomy 33:1

In Moses' blessing to Israel he reveals his desires, observations, and beliefs about what God would do for his people. We can imagine the sincerity and boldness in Moses' voice. He would soon die, and they would soon enter the promised land.

The church is a royal priesthood, called to be a community of blessing (1 Peter 2:9). We are recipients and givers of God's blessings. A blessing can be formal or informal, giving comfort, encouragement, peace, and hope for the present going into the future. Our informal blessings can include our possessions, family members, friends, neighbors, home, job, neighborhood, community, and more. A formal blessing can be delivered in a worship service, as a pastor invites the people to receive a benedic-

tion ("good word") from the Lord.

We can give sincere, Spirit-led informal blessings to our brothers and sisters in Christ. These may be inspired by what we desire for a person's good; what we have observed about their life, work, and spiritual gifts; and what we believe God can do in their life.

Our brothers and sisters need our blessings, and we do well to give them. Ask the Spirit to be aware of where blessings are needed and how to encourage someone with them. The Spirit of God will guide our thoughts and words.

Father God, thank you for our community of blessing. Use us to bless others by extending your love, joy, peace, and hope. In Jesus, Amen.

## INTIMACY WITH GOD

*Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.*  
—Deuteronomy 34:10

What an incredible privilege to have intimacy with God!

The Lord initiated his relationship with Moses at Mount Horeb in the wilderness by appearing to him from within a bush that was full of flames but did not burn up (Exodus 3). God called to him, "Moses! Moses!" and told him to take off his shoes, for he was standing on holy ground. Moses obeyed God and was assured of God's presence from that initial encounter. God instructed Moses in carrying out his mission, and he listened when Moses spoke to him. It was the beginning of an intimate relationship.

Being in God's presence is a spiritual encounter, whether private or public. We cannot make it happen on our own. The Lord must draw us to himself. We can experience God's presence anywhere at any

time because God is always with us, no matter where we are (Psalm 139:7-18; Matthew 28:20). We may experience God's presence while reading the Bible, praying, worshiping, serving a prison sentence, lying in the hospital, or washing dishes.

Sometimes we are desperate for intimacy with God. Like David, we may thirst and long for God's presence (Psalm 42). The spiritual practices of solitude, reading the Bible, fasting, and prayer can help us cultivate intimacy with God.

Holy Spirit, draw me near. Help me to cultivate an intimate relationship with God. Fill me with your refreshing presence each day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## FINISH WELL!

*No one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.*

—Deuteronomy 34:12

Moses remained committed to the Lord until the very end of his life. He was a child of God, a diligent leader of God's people, a prophet, and much more. Moses is described as a "man of God" and a "servant of the Lord" in the closing chapters of Deuteronomy. He knew who he was and whose he was. That makes a difference in one's life. Moses was faithful. Though he was certainly not perfect, Moses finished well.

When we think about finishing well, we realize it is not a last-minute commitment. We can stay focused even when we must take detours and alter our plans. When we fall, we get up with the Lord's help. When things do not go the way we thought they would, we cannot allow our feelings and thoughts to get in the way of doing God's will. We know

we depend on the Lord in all things, and we stand firm in his strength.

When our time comes to leave our home on earth to go to our eternal home in heaven (unless Jesus returns before then), we want to say, "I have fought the good fight . . . I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). And we want to hear our Lord say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21).

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, help me to be fully committed to doing your will until the very end of my life. May you be glorified! Amen.

# NOTES

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