



Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

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Deuteronomy 2 & 3
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We Will Remember

SERIES: *Turning Point: Start Fresh/Stay the Course*

"Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea, as the LORD told me. And for many days we traveled around Mount Seir. Then the LORD said to me, 'You have been traveling around this mountain country long enough. Turn northward...'" (Deuteronomy 2:1-3).

I'm pretty sure that the Lord has a sense of humor. Have you ever read the Bible and just laughed at something in it? I sure have. Here is the nation of Israel; our best guess is that there were roughly 2 million folks circling Mt. Seir for "many days." Around and around they go. The funny thing is is that they had no idea where to go! They didn't have a map to the Promised Land; all they could do is circle the same mountain until the Lord told them where to go. Finally God says, ok enough of that, head north.

Have you ever felt like the Israelites? You are just going around and around in circles? Maybe you have what you would describe as a dead end job. You don't really like it, but it is paying the bills. Maybe you are in a relationship that seems to be going nowhere. You've talked about marriage, but you feel as if you are just wandering with no clear direction for the future. Maybe your health has just been your wilderness wandering. You've gone in and out of doctor's offices and you feel like you are getting nowhere. What about finances? If you are like me you are trying to save and be a good steward of your resources and then something happens to a car or a refrigerator and your nest egg is depleted, back to the beginning. Why can't we get ahead? Maybe you can't pinpoint why you feel the way you do, but you can relate to the Israelites. You are in the wilderness, wandering, going around and around a stupid mountain, wondering what in the world God wants you to do.

The most difficult part, I think, about wandering around in circles in life is that it is real hard to have any strength for the present or courage for the future. When you are wandering in the wilderness, you're tired of being tired, bummed out that you are going nowhere, and the future, to be honest, does not look very bright. Have you ever been there? Are you there now?

Whether you have once wandered in circles in the wilderness, are currently orbiting a mountain, or sense that you are heading that way, how in the world do you not only survive but also thrive? How do we get strength for the present and courage for the future?

For all of us who can relate to what I am talking about, my goal this morning is to encourage you! I plan to

pile upon your shoulders a heavy mound of encouragement with these two chapters of Deuteronomy. Often times, we need to be challenged, rebuked, and convicted; this is not going to be one of those sermons.

I. Why Deuteronomy?

If you missed last week, Mark did an incredible job of explaining why we are studying the book of Deuteronomy and then preached on the first chapter. To be honest, I've studied it very little in seminary and can't even remember ever hearing a sermon on it. The amazing thing though is that it is the most often quoted book by Jesus! In fact, one scholar said, "The book of Deuteronomy expresses most fully God's essence and character." We've entitled this series, "Turning Point: start fresh, stay the course."

Following the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai, Israel traveled through the wilderness region south of Palestine and then northward to the east of the Dead Sea. They came across a series of small states and preliminary battles as they seek to occupy the Promised Land, which lay to the west of the river Jordan. The events described in Deuteronomy took place immediately before the crossing of the Jordan. Israel was at a turning point. They were about to enter the Land God has prepared for them, but they needed further instruction. Deuteronomy is really three long sermons by Moses in which he tells this new generation to start fresh and stay the course.

The second reason we are doing this series is because on January 11, 2009, our church will be giving birth to a new church campus of CPC in Millbrae. This is a huge turning point for CPC. It will take everyone praying, serving, giving, and participating in this work. Much like the Israelites, the charge to start fresh and stay the course will require faith on our part and trust in the God who goes before us.

In the first three chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses addresses the people of Israel on the plains of Moab by looking back at their history and what God has brought them through. In chapter one, Moses recounts their time in Kadesh-barnea and really points out how the previous generation did not trust God. He tells them what went wrong and why they had to wander for 40 years. But then, in chapters 2-3 Moses recounts their time at Mt Seir, in Moab, Ammon, Heshbon and in Bashan. These events of the past are recollected so that Israel will not lose sight of the importance of the present moment—they are going to enter the Promised Land. So Moses looks back and

remembers what God has done for them. Moses recounts first their journey from Mt. Seir, through Moab and then through Ammon.

II. Recollections of Mount Seir, Moab and Ammon.

“...and command the people, ‘You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. You shall purchase food from them for money, that you may eat, and you shall also buy water of them for money, that you may drink’” (2:4–6).

“And the LORD said to me, ‘Do not harass Moab or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given Ar to the people of Lot for a possession’” (2:9).

“And when you approach the territory of the people of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession” (2:19).

In all three of these journeys God allowed Israel to pass through them peacefully. There was no bloodshed, no war, just a whole lot of walking.

Now, if I were an Israelite during this time, what would have been my motivation for continuing to drag my family through the desert along with hundreds of thousands of my kinfolk? Moses is a great motivator and would have made Zig Ziglar and Anthony Robbins proud. Listen to what he says: **“For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing” (Deut. 2:7).**

Wow! Tell me if that is not one of the most encouraging verses you have read in a long time? Moses reminds Israel that God has:

- Blessed them in all they have done
- Has known their wanderings
- Been with them through it all
- Has provided for them and they have not

lacked a thing

Moses reminds Israel of God’s care for them and the fact that God always keeps his promise. For 40 years Israel has been wandering through the desert. The exodus generation has died and a new generation has emerged. These people are tired, beat up, weary, and wondering what God is doing in their midst. And so Moses, like a

good football coach, motivates his team by reminding them that God has been with them every step of the way and has provided all the necessities of life. And he will do the same as they enter this new land.

The truth of Scripture is that God has done and will do the same for you and me. No matter if you are wandering in the wilderness or not, trust that God is with you and that he will provide!

About two years ago I was living in Pasadena and finishing my Masters of Divinity. It was a great time for my family because I was in school full-time, my wife was working part-time, we lived in this tiny apartment in the hood, we only had one car, and our lives were totally simplified. But, it was also a really tough time for us because we felt that we were somewhat in the wilderness—we didn’t know where we were going to go or what we were going to do after I graduated.

That entire year was spent praying a lot about our future. We traveled all over the place looking at different job opportunities from church planting in Vail, Colorado to working for a huge church in Minnesota! It was a crazy time and in it all, I had a real difficult time trying to understand what God was doing. I was reading his Word, praying, seeking godly counseling, repenting of sin, and pushing through what I thought was open door after open door. In it all, I still had no peace and no understanding of what God wanted for my family! It was totally frustrating, totally humbling, and in it all, I can remember telling people that I felt that God was just giving me enough light on the path to take one step at a time. Now looking back, I can see much clearer. God was teaching me patience, how to slow down. God was doing things in me and preparing me for my next ministry, but it was a hard season for us. I learned a lesson that I know I’ll learn over and over and that is in those times of wilderness wanderings we need to trust that God is with us and that he will provide! At the time that is all I could lean on, the fact that God was near and that he is a great provider. What more did I need?

Practically, if you are having trouble sensing that God is near to you and that he will provide for you, I want to encourage you to do something. At the end of your day, think about and write down all the ways you saw God draw near to you and provide for you. Make sense? Maybe you saw God encourage you through a godly and faithful friend who took you out to coffee to talk. Maybe God provided for you that day by getting you out of a ticket for talking on your cell phone!

The next thing Moses reminds Israel of is their two most recent conquests of both Heshbon and Bashan. This time, Israel would not be allowed to pass by peacefully.

III. The Conquests of Heshbon and Bashan.

The relative peaceful journey through the

previous lands would abruptly change as Israel came to its first of several battles. However, this battle would not be dependent on great military strategy, but in the promise and plan of the Lord.

“Rise up, set out on your journey and go over the Valley of the Arnon. Behold, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to take possession, and contend with him in battle” (2:24).

The previous rebellious generation had said that the Lord would turn them over to the Amorites (1:27), because the Lord hated them! But this new and obedient generation was ready for the Amorites to be handed over to them. What a contrast!

“But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day. And the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to take possession, that you may occupy his land.' Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Jahaz. And the LORD our God gave him over to us, and we defeated him and his sons and all his people” (2:30–33).

Victory was assured from the start, however, Israel had to act and enter the battle! The victory over Sihon was a source of strength and encouragement to Israel. Israel continued to go through town after town. God was leading them, providing for them, going ahead of them, and defeating foes for them. But, they soon came to another power kingdom.

Like King Sihon, King Og would not allow Israel to pass through his land and came out against them with his armed forces. Externally, things did not look good for Israel. Og was another Amorite king who apparently was a giant (verse 11 tells us that his bed was huge, 13-1/2 feet long!) and his kingdom seemed invincible. Listen to how the kingdom of Og is described in chapter 3:5. **“All these were cities fortified with high walls, gates, and bars, besides very many unwallled villages.”**

Og ruled over 60 separate communities, and his kingdom was very well fortified and strong. This was a HUGE obstacle in their way! But God’s people would not be destroyed. Look at what happens.

“Then we turned and went up the way to Bashan. And Og the king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. But the LORD said to me, 'Do not fear him, for I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand. And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.' So the LORD our God gave into our hand Og also, the

king of Bashan, and all his people, and we struck him down until he had no survivor left” (3:1-3).

The rich and fertile land of Bashan was given over to the Israelites. God fulfilled his promise in verse 2 by delivering the kingdom of Og into their hands.

I think the point Moses is making by reminding his people of these conquests is that God is faithful. The fact that Israel was able to conquer these two powerful kings and their kingdoms is further proof that God fought for Israel. As Israel seeks to enter the Promised Land they will continue to face obstacles and giants, but God is faithful and God will fight for them. This new generation who will occupy the Promised Land are learning to trust in the Lord again.

For those of us who are going around in circles in life and wandering in the desert, we find strength for the present and courage for the future by remembering that God is faithful and that God will fight our battles. I can think of so many times that I’ve tried to fight my own battles. It is so exhausting, isn’t it?

My son is really into superheroes like Batman and Spiderman. Just the other day he asked me, “Dad, who is stronger, Spiderman or Batman?” I said, probably Spiderman. Then he asked, “Is Superman stronger than Spiderman?” And I said, “Yeah, I think so.” Then he asked just the cutest question in the world, “Is God stronger than Superman?” And I just loved to answer that question, “Oh yes son, God is much stronger than Superman.”

We all believe that, right? But when it comes down to the daily battles that you and I fight we somehow lose sight of that fact, don’t we? Truth be told, in some of our battles, we wouldn’t mind sending Superman to kick some butt.

I don’t know what battles are going on in your life today, but the promise from this text is that God is with us, God is faithful, and God will fight for you.

Practically, I’d encourage you to write out the battles that you are facing in a journal and prayerfully submit them to the Lord. Say, these battles I am giving over to you, trusting that you will fight them for me. Now that doesn’t mean that your definition of winning is the same as God’s. But I do know that God will give you a sense of peace as you relinquish control.

Let’s turn and look at the last half of chapter three and the charge that Moses gives to the soon to be leader of the new generation of Israelites.

IV. The Charge to Joshua.

“And I commanded you at that time, saying, 'The LORD your God has given you this land to possess. All your men of valor shall cross over armed before your brothers, the people of

Israel. Only your wives, your little ones, and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock) shall remain in the cities that I have given you, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers, as to you, and they also occupy the land that the LORD your God gives them beyond the Jordan. Then each of you may return to his possession which I have given you.' And I commanded Joshua at that time, 'Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings. So will the LORD do to all the kingdoms into which you are crossing. You shall not fear them, for it is the LORD your God who fights for you'" (3:18–22).

"But charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he shall go over at the head of this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land that you shall see" (3:28).

After motivating the nation of Israel to remember all that God has done, Moses looks to his successor and does the same for him. Joshua would soon take Moses' place and lead the Israelites into the land of promise.

Let's stop and think about the responsibility that Joshua was given here. The task before him was formidable. Take this huge group of whiners, complainers, and ragamuffins into a new land that they have never been to. Oh yeah, and there will be more enemies to face, and more drama to deal with, and you'll have to divide up the land among the tribes. It won't be easy; Moses will die.

Why does Moses further remind Joshua of what God has done in the past? Because remembering what God has done in the past will give him strength for the present and courage for the future. As God has done in the past, he will do the same as they cross over the Jordan. Moses tells Joshua not to fear man, the tangible enemy, for the Lord, invisible and intangible, fights for you!

Joshua, a new young leader takes over the reins of leadership from Moses and I am sure he is overwhelmed at what lies ahead. For you and me, sometimes we can look at the future and be overwhelmed too. We wonder, how can I do this? We wonder will I lead my family well? Will I get through this huge task God has put before me? In all this though, Israel's experience with God in the past gives them strength for the present and courage for the future. And our experience with God does the same.

CONCLUSION

Well, my goal was to encourage you from this text. Here is the main source of encouragement: Remembering what God has done in the past gives us strength for the present and courage for the future.

Deuteronomy chapter 2 and 3 is a charge for us to remember what God has done for us. In fact, to remember is not only a major theme in Deuteronomy but in the entire Bible. The word "remember" is stated about 166 times in the Bible. The God who created us knows that we easily forget.

You would think that it would be easy for Israel, who had seen God's miraculous hand through the exodus, to their wilderness wanderings where God provided a cloud by day, fire by night, and manna and quail to eat, to trust God as they enter the land, but it was not. Think about it, we are forgetful people! I have a hard time just remembering the birthday of my family and friends!

I heard a funny joke that I just had to share. There were three sisters—ages 92, 94, and 96—who lived together. One night, the 96-year-old drew a bath. She put one foot in, and then paused. "Was I getting in the tub or out?" she yelled. The 94-year-old hollered back, "I don't know, I'll come and see." She started up the stairs, but stopped on the first one. She shouted, "Was I going up or coming down?" The 92-year-old was sitting at the kitchen having tea, listening to her sisters with a smirk on her face. She shook her head and said, "I sure hope I never get that forgetful," and knocked on wood for good measure. Then she yelled, "I'll come up and help both of you as soon as I see who's at the door."

I think there are a whole bunch of reasons why we forget. Let me just give you two.

First, I think that we get easily distracted. We live in a world of distraction. The messages from the media, from marketing, from TV to the Internet can distract us: this is what you should wear, this is what life is really all about. Work, the events of life, and circumstances can all distract us. Think about it, isn't that one of the reasons God allows us to wander in the wilderness? It's in the wilderness that God strips us of the things that distract us. That's what he did for Israel.

Secondly, I think we easily forget what God has done because we are self-absorbed, self-sufficient, self-focused people! Has anyone ever forgotten their own birthday? No way! Not a chance! We all have a propensity to love ourselves and serve ourselves that we easily stray to forgetfulness.

I am sure you can add to the list many more reasons why we forget God and what he has done in our lives, but the next question is: How do we remember?

Let me just offer up a few ways to remember what God has done. First, there are the three main ways we can remember what God has done:

- His Word
- Community
- The work of the Holy Spirit

Why do we stress the importance of reading, teaching, preaching and living the Bible? Because not only is it God's Word but also it is the primary way for us to remember who God is and what he has done!

Through community, we gather around other followers of Christ and collectively remember who God is and what he has done through worship, prayer, teaching, and fellowship. Again, that is why we stress the importance of getting connected to community

around here. And then, the Holy Spirit takes both the words of Scripture and the fellowship of the saints to work into our lives the things we need to remember. Let me also just give you three very practical ways to remember.

First, I think we ought to memorialize certain things God has done in our lives. For example, I know some Christians who celebrate their birthday and their spiritual birthday. They know the date that they trusted in Christ and they celebrate that date with a cake, party, or just by taking the day to remember how God saved them. What are some ways you can memorialize what God has done in your life?

Second, a good way to remember what God has done in the past is to take pictures and look them over from time to time. Now, obviously there are many things God has done in your life that you can't take a picture of—I get that. But for me, I have a picture of when I got baptized that I like to look at from time to time. I have a ton of pictures of camps, retreats, and missions trips that I can look back on and remember what God did. I have photo albums full of memories with my family that remind me of God's grace and provision in my life and I am sure you do too. So, get them out, look at them and thank God for those moments.

And lastly, I would encourage you to again to keep a journal and write down the ways God has worked in your lives. Then you can go back and look at them and draw strength and courage from those words.

Remembering what God has done in the past gives us strength for the present and courage for the future.

Think about the times of struggle that you have gone through and ask yourself, what did God do? What did I learn? God has been merciful, generous, just, strong and sovereign in all our lives. How do we draw strength for whatever is going on in our lives? We need to REMEMBER what God has done for us in the past. How do we face the future with courage? By remembering who God is and what he has done! There is power in remembering and reflecting on who God is and what he has done.