

The Weekly Word

August 8-14, 2016

As the lazy hazy days of summer envelop us, don't let it dampen your time in God's Word. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, August 8: Deuteronomy 1- Unvarnished truth...

As Moses readies the people for their entrance into the Promised Land, he stands before them and recounts their journey. Moses recalls the good and the bad. He is honest about their failures. In an age when high lights were often preserved but not low lights, Moses records the unvarnished truth of Israel's journey to freedom.

Facing our past honestly and truthfully is a powerful ally to spiritual growth. Some people keep a journal. There is a part of me that honors even envies people who can keep a journal, especially one that truthfully records ups and downs, wonderings, questions and insights. But I have never had the discipline to journal and at this time I am not feeling the spiritual impulse to begin. Maybe someday???

Journaling aside, being honest about our past and present is an important step in spiritual growth. Only when we can face who we truly are can we ever hope to call out for God's strength to change and become who God longs for us to be.

Lord, God, I pray that I am honest with myself and with You. I pray that this will help me grow in You and that I will not simply age, but mature as Your child. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, August 9: Deuteronomy 2- Living at God's command...

As I read through this chapter the first thought that came to me was "living at God's command."

During the 40 years of wilderness wanderings, Israel was learning to live at God's command. For 38 years they traveled around the hill country of Seir. When God lifted His presence from the tabernacle they moved, when His presence descended they stayed. They went where He led... no more, no less. They went where God directed.

Then when the faithless generation died off God directed them north. Twice during the first days north God clearly told them not to attack Moab or the Amorites. Why? Because God had sworn to Esau and Lot that He would give them land and these were the lands and peoples who came from them. In fact, they were even to pay Moab for food eaten and water used.

But when they came to Sihon, they were to fight and destroy that people and take their land, animals and cities. This was the first stage of conquest. It was also a time for the Israelites to learn to fight, something they would have to do a lot once they crossed the Jordan.

What I realized, as I read this, is that Israel was learning to listen to the Lord and do what He said to do... not what their human inclinations told them to do.

As I thought about this I realized that they were learning the essence of the life of faith... they were learning how to hear God's voice and obey it.

And this is the basic issue for every believer... to learn, to discern the voice of the Lord and then to obey.

For 40 years I have been reading the Bible. Part of my desire is to learn the Word of God. But another part was to become so familiar with the voice of the Lord that I can discern when He is speaking directly to my spirit. This is the first step of faithful following. The second is to obey when God speaks.

I am growing better at this, but I still have a long way to go...

How are you doing at discerning and obeying the voice of the Lord?

Oh, God help me learn... help me grow. Holy Spirit, be my teacher and guide, especially when I am weak willed and don't want to obey, spur me on to faithfulness. Kick me in the butt if need be... wake me up that I will obey You.

This is my prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, August 10: Deuteronomy 3- An invitation to be real...

I saw a number of lessons in verses 23-27 from today's chapter.

At that time I pleaded with the LORD: "Sovereign LORD, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do? Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan—that fine hill country and Lebanon."

But because of you the LORD was angry with me and would not listen to me. "That is enough," the LORD said. "Do not speak to me anymore about this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah and look west and north and south and east. Look at the land with your own eyes, since you are not going to cross this Jordan. ..."

God allows, even invites, us to ask anything of Him. Living in relationship with the Lord, He wants us to come to Him with whatever burdens our heart. Moses pleaded with the Lord to change His mind and allow Moses to go into the Promised Land. I am touched by the text, which says *I pleaded with the Lord...* Moses knew what the Lord had said. This was not disobedience but prayer grew out of all God was doing and Moses' longing to see the great works of the Lord. And so he prayed, he begged, he pleaded.

Second, I notice that God listens. However, when He has heard enough He will say so or end the conversation, as He did with Abraham in Genesis 18:33. God can and will say "Enough." And wisdom teaches us that is when we are to stop pleading. Paul pleaded three times with the Lord... (2Cor 12:8); not 4 times, not 5. Paul pleaded but when God answered, even though the answer was not what Paul wanted to hear, Paul accepted God's response. Moses accepted the Lord's response here.

Three, God answers and Moses accepted God's answer even though it wasn't what he desired.

Four, in this case God showed some grace even though His judgment didn't change. I love the way the Lord allowed Moses to go up the mountain to see the land, even though He didn't allow Moses' feet to touch the land. Even in a 'NO' God can and sometimes does give us grace. To Paul in 2Cor 12:9 God said *"My grace is sufficient for you..."* God did not heal Paul but reminded him of His grace.

As I meditate on these thoughts, I am realizing anew how much the Lord desires for us to live in relationship with Him. And true relationship involves honest communication. God doesn't want us to hide our desires from Him but to express them remembering, of course, that God can and often does say 'No'. After all God is God and we are not!

I am reminded that God invites me to come to Him, to sit in His lap, to be real and honest with Him.

What a gift we have in Jesus... an open and full relationship with the God of the Universe.
This morning God is bidding me to come to Him...
God is bidding you to come to Him, too.

Oh, Lord God, thank You that I can bring my full self to You and even when You will not grant my desires – and You know best Lord – You still delight when I come to You. You love me and will give me what is best. I know that and I believe You.

Praise to You, Lord God. I am Yours, delightfully Yours. Use me as You will, grant me what You will, that I may serve You all the days of my life until You usher me into Your eternal kingdom. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, August 11: Deuteronomy 4- Remember and obey...

Two verses stuck to my heart as I read this morning.

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 (9).

Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time (40).

Remember and obey... teach the younger generation to remember and obey as well.

It is so easy to forget what God has done in the past. At least for me remembering takes effort. I live very much in the moment. I don't necessarily dream a lot about the future and when it comes to the past, I am more of a sieve rather than a bank vault. I have to take time to recall and remember. I have to make it a point to remember. Maybe this is why Moses' words strike so close to the heart.

Remember and teach... tell the young ones the story of God's exploits, what He has done, and what He has said. Teaching and telling others helps remembering, too. The more I teach and tell, the more the stories of faith get branded into my memory.

My wife and I have a tradition of writing a yearly letter, usually around Christmas/New Year, where we recount the things we have done that year. Very naturally God shows up in that letter because God is the major component of our lives. It is not as if we set out to write about what God did during year, but that certainly comes through. We send this letter to family and friends and we keep a copy for ourselves. Every so often I look through these memoirs of life and my heart is bolstered as I remember the many ways God brought goodness and His presence into my (our) life. These letters are not exactly what Moses was speaking about, but in these letters I can see the wisdom of God in the teachings Moses gave.

Remember... remember so that you obey. God's Word to me today.

Lord, thank You for the gift of memory. The ability to store and recall events, feelings, emotions and facts. Lord, may I use my memory for good, to remember the ways You have touched my life and the lives of people I know. May I use my memory to store Your Word and Your teachings so that I can recall what You have said as I walk the journey of life.

Bless You, God, for the gift of memory when it is used for good and to spur me on to love and good deeds. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, August 12: Deuteronomy 5- the 10 Commandments...

The 10 Commandments dominate this chapter.

Just yesterday I was teaching a class when the 10 Commandments came up. I shared with the class that many people look at them as God restricting how we should live. The 10 Commandments are like jail cell bars keeping us confined.

But I commented that I see them more as guardrails on the side of a mountainous road. In other words the 10 Commandments are loving limits that God sets for our own wellbeing and if we live within them and if society would live within them life would be so much better. Seriously, if no one lied and always spoke truthfully image how much better the world would be. We could trust people's word.

How much simpler would life be if no one ever stole anything. I know it sounds like a utopia of sorts, but life would be so much better if people lived within the parameters of the 10 Commandments.

How many families are broken and destroyed because one of the adults has an affair? The hurt and pain caused by affairs is staggering. Wouldn't the world be better if that didn't happen?

In my view of the 10 Commandments are not jail bars confining us from 'fun.' Instead I think they were guardrails God erected to keep us from crashing and burning.

So as I read the Commandments I thanked the Lord that He cared enough for us that He established rules that could guide us and keep us from much pain if we obey them.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord... He is so good. He cared enough to give us these wise rules for living. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Father. Thank You, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Saturday, August 13: Deuteronomy 6- love God... but how/...

Love God, give your loving of God everything you have. This is the very simple and straightforward message I heard from the Lord as I read this chapter.

Love God and give it everything you have.

This simple message never gets old and it is always applicable.

And so I ponder and meditate on how I can practically live this word out...

Obedience

Trust

Perseverance in the face of hardship

Dedication to the things of God

Doing godly actions rather than simply indulging self

These are some of the practical ways that came to mind. There are many more.

Before I end today's time with Jesus and before you do, how about making your own list even as I continue to make mine.

God, You have loved me first. You sent Jesus to die in my place and for everyone who believes. How can I do anything less than love You, God, with everything I have? I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, August 14, 2016, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.