

*Deuteronomy 26:5-10. Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. <sup>6</sup> But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. <sup>8</sup> So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; <sup>10</sup> and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him.*

**Remember your Lord.**

**Remember what he has done for you.**

**Remember what he has given to you.**

Before he heads out the door with his wife, a man fills out the check, slides it into the envelope, and calls out, "Let me take care of this first, so I don't forget."

It's easy to forget. The temptation in this fast-past world that we live in is to move on to the next thing or the moment, to be distracted by this and that, and we forget to take care of the most important things. And while paying the bills is up there on the priority list (and certainly something that we do not want to forget to take care of) there is one thing that should never be removed from the number one slot. Remember your Lord. Remember what he has done for you. Remember what he has given to you.

Remember your Lord. This phrase has been used as a simple summary of the entire book of Deuteronomy. This book is like a long sermon (a very long – 33-chapter long sermon) as Moses publicly addresses the people as they are about to enter the Promised Land. In this final address to the people, Moses would expound upon how God had faithfully provided for them. Moses would recall how God had given them great victories, how the LORD had fulfilled the promised that he gave to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, giving their descendants the gift of the Promised Land. And Moses would go on to explain how God in his goodness had also established the civil and ceremonial and moral laws that would be used to govern and set apart his people as they lived in this Land of Promise.

Here in chapter 26, Moses is recounting God's command that the people were to give tithes and offerings, and here Moses highlights the giving of the first-fruits. As the people would enter the land of Promise, they were to not forget from whom all these gifts came. They came from the LORD. The fruit of the land, their success and prosperity, the wealth and well-being, the very land that they inhabited and farmed and

depended on for the things of life, it all came from the LORD. Therefore, as a regular remembrance of God's faithful love and generous blessings that come from his hand, the people were to give a first-fruit offering. A first-fruit offering meant that they were to take some of the very first portion of the harvest and give it to the LORD. They were to bring it to the place of worship, place the gift in a basket, and bring it to the priest. In doing this they would recall the goodness that God had shown to their nation, their people, and to each one of them as individuals. They would bring forth their gift and then they would declare before the LORD God the following statement, "***My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. <sup>6</sup> But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil, and oppression. <sup>8</sup> So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders.***" From Abraham to Israel to Moses, from a single wanderer to an entire nation of people who had been rescued from famine, abundantly blessed in a foreign land, delivered from slavery by the wonders of God, and now brought to the threshold of a land overflowing with naturally resources, it was clear, abundantly clear, that the LORD God had been with his people. He had provided for them. He had delivered them from trouble, from famine, from slavery, from toil and oppression, from their own self-destruction and now he was going to bless them with this land of Promise. God had been good to his people. God would continue to be faithful in his steadfast love and mercy.

Remember the Lord. Remember what he had done for you. Remember what he has given you. This all should have been obvious, and abundantly clear. This command to give a tenth of their wealth and recall the goodness of God should have been a command that would lead to a regular exercise in joyful worship and abundant thanksgiving. It should have been.

But... we know from this history of God's people, it very often didn't work out this way. They would forget to remember the goodness of God. They would be reluctant and empty in their giving - if they gave at all. When they were in need, they gave in to the temptation to grumble and complain; and they did it often. When they experienced moderate to abundant blessing, often they focused so much on the material gifts in front of them that they forgot about the giver. Sometimes they even cried out to other gods in their time of need or gave praise and glory to idols for the gifts that they had been given. Praising God with first-fruit gifts should have been an obvious response to the obvious care and abundant faithfulness of God. But they were sinful people who often God distracted by the gifts that God had given to them.

Sound familiar... well, that's probably because the devil likes to throw the same old temptations in front of us. After all, if it works so well why would he stop laying out this same trap? Thus, when we are in want or need, when our livelihood is threatened

by dips or plunges or difficulties, we fall prey to panic and we complain about God and his care. We doubt the love of God, we become skeptical of his faithful love, we grumble. We withhold or withdraw or draw back on the gifts that we give to God. On the other hand, when blessings are abundantly given, when times are good, when our lives are made comfortable by material wealth, we look so attentively at the gifts that we forget about the giver. In times of plenty and comfort, we may easily spend a bit more on a few extra trinkets and treats or even a few too many big-ticket luxury items for ourselves or for our families that go beyond a godly budget. We head out to the restaurant or the movies or the casino without hesitation as we treat ourselves with an extra trip or two, but we don't give it a second thought to analyze or increase our gifts to God. Both in times of want and in times of plenty we are tempted to make idols out of money and overlook our Lord. Remember the Lord. God has given us everything. He provides for us when we are in need. He is the source of blessing when we are blessed with plenty. Trust in him. Give thanks to God.

Remember the Lord. Remember what he has given to you. Remember what he has done for you. For the sin of materialism so often is not just about a momentary lapse, or an oversight in the monthly budget, but the devil either in subtle or obvious ways is looking for a way, any way to drag us completely away from God; and in this pursuit he often uses the idol of material wealth. The devil takes this human need that we all have, and he twists it into the pressing and constant temptation as he looks to jumble our priorities, skew our vision of what is important, and make us blind to the true source of our well-being. And he does this as he leans into our selfish sinful flesh and the crafty one desires to instill in us a love of money that dethrones and replaces our love for God. We see the warning against this temptation throughout Scripture. It is found in the disturbing trend and destructive cycle of the Israelites giving themselves over to the prosperity and fertility gods that held out the empty promise of wealth and pleasure. It is found also in Paul's clearly stated warning. ***10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. – 1 Timothy 6:10.***

Remember the Lord. Watch out for this sin of materialism and greed and stinginess toward God. The same God that who promised and gave a land and a nation to the children of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, is the same LORD who generously opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. The same God who delivered his people from famine, by sending them down to Egypt and working behind the scenes so that Joseph would be on hand to receive and bless the sons of Israel, is the one who we can trust when times are tight, when famine or flurry causes us to be concerned about our livelihood. The God who provided then, is the LORD who provides still today. The God who delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, who extended his mighty hand and sent miraculous signs and wonders, who sent the plagues to free his people from Pharaoh's terrible grip, has set us free from the cold and steely grasp of sin, death, and hell. In his almighty power, in his great love, he sent his Son to be our

Deliverer. God sent his Son into the wilderness on a direct route to take on the devil for us. He sent his Son to be our substitute, to shut down the devil's temptation in our place. The Son of God came as the Son of Man to demonstrate perfectly that *man does not live on bread alone* and that all the kingdoms of the world are not the devil's to give, nor are they worth our soul. With thankfulness, we believe in the one who stood his ground and defeated all of Satan's temptation for us. With our hearts, we believe in this one the Scriptures proclaim. With our lips, we confess that he is Lord. The way that we handle our daily affairs can second that confession in the way that we give generously and thankfully to the Lord. Through our lips and through our lives we confess our trust in the Lord. Both in times of plenty and in times of want we will trust in the LORD and thankfully bring our gifts to His house of worship, and place them in the basket, as remember that the LORD opens his hand and gives us everything that we need, including a Savior.

Christ comes forth from the desert as our victor over temptation and then he mindfully goes the way of the cross, step after mindful step, to take away our sin, to pay for all our sins, including our ungratefulness and greed, our overindulging in material gifts and our underappreciating of our glorious Giver.

It's easy to forget. In the daily grind of day-to-day needs, in the world saturated with materialism and greed, the Lord calls out to us. Please, remember. Watch out for the old evil foe who likes to dress up his old temptations in glittery new ways.

As Moses stood before God people and pleaded with God's people to remember, as Paul wrote to Timothy and warned him against the dangers of those sins of materialism and greed, I stand before you now and encourage you: Dear people of God, watch out for materialism, guard your heart against the love of money, ***flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.*** <sup>12</sup> ***Fight the good fight of the faith. And take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. – 1 Timothy 6:11,12.***

In short, fellow people of God, remember the Lord. Remember what he has done for you. Remember what he has given to you, both in this life and for all eternity in Christ Jesus. And remembering all this, remember to bring a planned and proportionate offering, put it in the basket, and gladly give to the LORD with abundant thanksgiving. *For man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. – Matthew 4:4.* Remember your Lord who recited that very phrase in the midst of temptation. Remember how he lived and died and rose again in perfect obedience to God's gracious will so that you might be blessed with the riches of eternal life. Remember your Lord. Remember, Jesus Christ. Amen.