

## Deuteronomy 31:7-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: “Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.” Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. Moses commanded them: “Every seventh year, in the scheduled year of remission, during the festival of booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women, and children, as well as the aliens residing in your towns—so that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law, and so that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess.”

## 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

He was a very good friend, a real leader of our class during seminary,  
truly an incredibly talented, capable and committed Christian man,  
with a delightful wife and much loved, wonderful children.

He sailed right through even the toughest of our courses with ease,  
and the pulpit would come alive with his preaching and teaching...  
... it all seemed to come so easy and natural for him.

He was certainly one the best and brightest of our class,  
one of the most promising and gifted future pastors I knew.

Yet today I have no idea where he is or what he is doing,  
and I doubt very much that he is serving as a pastor.

You see, during the Spring of our second year of seminary,

tragically he had an affair with another married student ...  
... and they were both asked to leave the school  
as their marriages and especially their children's lives,  
were shattered, ground up and ripped to shreds.

Now, he was a good man, who did want to serve God faithfully,  
and he certainly had not intended to bring  
such devastation and shame into the lives of those he loved...

... **and as he told me afterward, it didn't suddenly happen all at once.**

No, it was a gradual decline with warnings all along the way,  
and plenty of choices, chances and opportunities to step back,  
which he ignored and rejected, until it was too late.

Why? - because he was so sure that he could handle it on his own,  
just as the Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians, vs. 12  
So if you think you are standing, **watch out that you do not fall.**

How many times in sports have you seen a team with a nice lead,  
get overly-confident, lay back and be defeated in the end?

When Paul wrote this letter to the Christians living in Corinth,  
despite appearances, divisive problems were starting to emerge.

In the passage we read today, Paul was trying to address  
some issues, questions and concerns that had come up  
after he had gone on to preach the Gospel in other places.

**The Church in Corinth seemed to have had every spiritual advantage.**

Paul, Apollos and even Simon Peter had visited and taught there.  
They were blessed with an impressive array of spiritual gifts.

**It would seem they had everything going for them.**

But as Paul points out,  
their comfortable-confidence and their self-assurance  
became **a spiritual arrogance that put them in grave danger.**

To make that reality clear and understandable **Paul makes a connection**  
between the ancient Israelites' journey from slavery  
through the wilderness toward the Promised land,  
and the Christians of Corinth along their spiritual journey  
through their wilderness of their trials and temptations.

As Paul points out  
the Israelites were incredibly blessed by God in countless ways,  
and so too Christians of Corinth  
were also blessed by God in countless and abundant ways.

When Pharaoh's army came in pursuit of the escaping Israelites  
and their backs were up against the sea with no possible escape,  
by the gracious and mighty act of God, the sea was parted,  
and the people passed safely through between the waters,  
**and emerged from the waters toward new life in the Promised land.**

Paul relates that scene to the sacrament of baptism in which  
**we are claimed and rescued by God**, passing through the water  
**toward a new life through Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God...**

Paul then makes another theological connection, between  
 the Israelites receiving and eating manna, bread from heaven,  
 to the sacrament of Communion,  
 when we receive and eat the bread of life.

Paul carefully explains these connections, vs. 2-3, 5

... all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food...  
**Nevertheless**, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Paul's point is that during the Exodus, the ancient Israelites  
 had received tremendous spiritual blessings and gifts from God,  
 and yet their bones were left strewn across the Sinai Desert.

So too for the Christians of the church in Corinth,  
 despite all of their spiritual advantages  
 of having been baptized and sharing the Lord's Table,  
**they were not guaranteed immunity against temptation or corruption  
 nor assured their lives would automatically be pleasing to the Lord.**

Paul interprets the stories of the Exodus and God's blessings  
 as instruction & warning against compromise & complacency, vs. 6, 11-12

Now these things occurred as **examples for us**, so that we might not desire evil as they did... These  
 things happened to them to **serve as an example**, and they were written down to **instruct us**, ... so if you think you  
 are standing, **watch out** that you do not fall.

**That is also a most critical message for us to hear & live during Lent.**

The season of Lent represents our spiritual journey  
 through this life's wilderness of trial and temptation,  
 as we seek to draw near and submit to God more and more,  
 faithful and spiritual preparation toward Easter. in

So just because we've received the sacraments - baptism & Communion,  
 just because we've had some wonderful worship experiences  
 and we have felt the gracious love and intimacy of the Lord,  
**that does not mean that we're spiritually complete  
 or safe and secure from temptation, sin and corruption.**

Living out a faithful Christian life is not easy,  
 for it goes against our selfish nature and the ways of this world,  
and we will fail badly **if we do not stay close to the Lord.**

The season of Lent represents  
 our spiritual journey toward the hope and grace of Easter,  
 through this life's wilderness of trial and temptation...  
**... something like the Israelites journey through their wilderness.**

And Paul's message certainly agrees with my own experience in life,  
 that I am most likely to say or do something foolish or destructive  
 when I am most sure and confident in my own strength and wisdom.

Paul's message is that it's not about our spiritual advantages,  
 or having had some incredible experiences of grace in the past,  
 but, it's the authenticity & grace of our walk with God, today ...  
 ... for the Christian life-of-faith is about an on-going relationship,  
 one in which we're drawn nearer to God all the days of our lives.

Whenever I officiate at a wedding,

I always warn the couple, that a beautiful wedding  
does not guarantee a long, happy & wonderful marriage...  
... you still have to work and build for that relationship to last.

**Any healthy relationship is never static, unchanging or done,  
but is always either growing and deepening, or it is fading.**

Though I have had some truly wonderful Spirit-filled experiences,  
though a Christian I continue to be vulnerable to sin & temptation,  
I still have a very, very long way to go, and somehow, my faith  
must remain **fresh, growing and be constantly reinvigorated.**  
**So my faith must be continuously fed, nurtured and exercised.**

We too may possibly share, with First Church of Corinth  
an unfortunate tendency toward **spiritual complacency**...

... a sense than now that I am a Christian & have received God's grace,  
now that my place in heaven has been assured by salvation & faith,  
**now I can just sit back and relax in my faith while I wait.**

Yes, we're save by God's grace alone, but that's not the end of it.  
Salvation includes a continuing response –  
our journey of growing and deepening faith.

**Now I want to be very clear about this next part,  
that Paul's message is not that we're not trying hard enough,  
or suppose that God loves us any less when we falter or fail.**

Lent is a season for reflecting on our faith response to God's grace.

The question we need to ask is, am I **intentionally** making more room  
for God's gracious love & purpose **to grow and transform my life?**

Am I living an authentic, fresh and deepening intimacy with God,  
that does penetrate my heart and that is making a real difference,  
and that those around me can recognize God's presence in my life?

When I was a boy, my father's aunt was an important part of my life,  
very influential in modeling a faithful Christian's walk.

It seemed that whenever she spoke, that her conversations,  
her words always seemed to connect back to a Bible passage.

I realize now that she saw & interpreted her whole life and the world  
through the enlightening and refracting lens of Holy Scripture.

The words & phrases she used were drawn from her Bible reading,  
helping her remain and live within God's constant presence...  
... guarding & guiding her every step; word, deed & even every thought,  
as in Psalm 119:104, Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

My Dad's aunt knew and lived something very important & significant  
about which Moses instructed the people in Deuteronomy: vs. 10-13

Moses commanded them: "... you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the  
people--men, women, and children, ... --so that they may hear and learn ... and to observe diligently all the words  
of this law, and so that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as  
long as you live in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess."

And once they were living in the Promised Land, it was critical

that they remember the amazing things God had done for them  
and to continue in their covenant relationship with the Lord.

It was, therefore, necessary to pass along that **knowledge of God**  
down through the ages, **from one generation to the next generation.**

So parents and grandparents, when exactly was the last time  
that you read and explained a Bible story to your children?

When did you last read through an entire book of the Bible,  
or seriously make an effort to learn some new biblical truth?

What are you doing now, so to inform and deepen your faith,  
and how has your faith grown deeper in the last few months?

How can we live faithful, obedient, growing Christian lives  
amid the unholy corruption, selfishness & depravity of this world,  
**if** our walk with the Lord has grown complacent, cold and stale?  
**if** our faith has become come lazy, weak and malnourished?  
**if** we are not regularly – deliberately feeding our souls?

The season of Lent is a lot like preparing my garden each Spring,  
when I turn the soil over, break it up and fertilize it,  
toward building **a good environment** for growing my plants.  
Similarly, I need to consider **my internal and spiritual environment.**

What are we doing to provide an environment for spiritual growth?

**So by my exposure to Scripture and actually thinking deeply about it,**  
I need to examine what are my true & secret motivations & attitudes,  
where I could be slipping into cynicism, arrogance or hypocrisy?

Are my relationships authentic, grace-driven, faithful & healthy?,  
and does my living communicate God's grace toward others in my life?

**Paul's point & intention was to shock those Christians in Corinth  
and to shake up their prideful complacency & self-satisfaction.**  
**But also,** Paul's message includes & concludes  
with great promise and good reason to hope!

Hope because of God's promise and assurance to always provide  
a way out of any moral, ethical or situational quagmire  
in which we find ourselves floundering and sinking ...

... for we're never tempted beyond God's strengthening to resist, vs. 13

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. **God is faithful**, and he will not let you be  
tested beyond your strength, but with the testing **he will also provide** the way out so that you may be able to  
endure it.

That is our hope --- because our God who loves us without limit,  
has promised, that the Lord will never give up on any of us,  
but that God will always provide a way out, so that we may prevail.

**And however much any one of us may stray, sin or get it all wrong,  
yet we always remain well within God's grace & redeeming love.**

**In this life, not every goal or desire is successfully fulfilled,  
but God still loves us, even when we stumble, fail and fall.**

As we are promised in Isaiah 49:15 and Psalm 103:13-14,

Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet **I will not forget you**. As a father has compassion for his children, so **the LORD has compassion ...**  
For he knows how we were made; **he remembers that we are dust**.