

### Deuteronomy 8:11-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.”

### Romans 8:5-11, 14 (New Revised Standard Version)

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

When the youth group travels in the vans to go on a mission trip,  
while we’re loading and before we ever leave the parking lot,  
all of the electronics, their cellphones, I-pods and such  
are all put away in a tool box for while we’re riding together...  
... so that we’re not distracted from conversation and relationships.

Now I know that the van ride would be far less noisy  
and the miles and time would probably pass more quickly  
with everyone quietly occupied and listening  
to their own music through their own ear-buds...  
  
... **but I would miss** getting to know and appreciate our youth,  
and the pleasure of building friendships within the group,  
not to mention sharing the exquisite scenery driving across Texas.

Truthfully, I want to take full advantage of that opportunity,  
and I don’t want to be distracted from the experience  
and delight of traveling with a van-full of youth...

**... and how much more so, I don’t want miss or to be distracted**

from all that God intends for me along my spiritual journey.

Especially during this season of our Lenten-travel toward Easter,  
I want to be aware, open, attentive, receptive and appreciative,  
for my relationship with God to grow more real, deeper & richer.

Most of us do want to live faithful and God-pleasing Christian lives,  
and we probably also sense that there is so much better and more,  
but that we can be too easily distracted and mis-focused.

Trying to follow & live out a life of faith fully isn't always simple,  
and at times we will continue to fall back or wallow in our old ways.  
**Our old self of sin, ego and selfishness is still lurking around,  
that can still influence our attitude, behavior & perspective.**

Instead of living joyful, and hope-filled lives, **transformed  
by the gracious love of God and the Holy Spirit at work in us,**  
sometimes we slip back into our old dead and defective ways,  
taking up the ways & values of this broken & corrupt world...

**... and so we live far less than the blessed lives intended by God,**  
which is the main point and message of the Deuteronomy 8 text.

The setting of this passage is that the people of Israel  
were finally just about to enter the Promised Land.

For 40 years in the wilderness, manna had been **a daily reminder**  
of their relationship and dependence on the Lord for everything.

But the manna they ate in the wilderness would stop coming  
once they could provide for themselves in the Promised Land.

The danger was that as they labored and prospered in the land,  
they might forget that everything **was still a gift from God.**

So Moses warned, don't let blessings **become a distraction,** vs. 12~18

When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, then do not exalt yourself,  
**forgetting the Lord your God,** who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ... Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might  
of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." **But remember the Lord your God,** for it is he who gives you power...

In the ancient Hebrew of the Old Testament,  
forgetting is not just drawing a blank or mental forgetfulness  
but failing to keep focused & fresh on the goal or objective.

When God commanded the Israelites 'not to forget, but remember'  
it meant to continuously strive to follow & obey God's commandments,  
and to live a faithful, useful and meaningful life **as God intends.**

That's also our ongoing challenge against distraction & complacency  
**that sometimes we fail to live transformed & exceptional lives  
that truly proclaim the love, truth & Gospel of Jesus Christ,  
and that faithfully reflects the forgiveness, grace and mercy of God.**

The call & hope for us, is to keep **Jesus at the center of our lives,**  
by seeking first an authentic & growing relationship with Christ  
that leads to meaningful, faithful & purposeful discipleship.

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Christian community living in Rome  
is a very clear and concise exploration of faith and discipleship,  
a call to stop, refocus and think deeply and carefully.

For seven chapters Paul has explained God's gifts of grace and life,  
that by that wonderful grace, we are freed from sin's penalty,  
and yet even with that grace, we do still fail & sin, **all of us.**

That understanding is a crucial theological & practical perspective  
that Paul explains as a contrast between flesh and Spirit, vs. 5-6, 9

For those who live **according to the flesh** set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live **according to the Spirit** set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Paul is writing about the battleground of our thoughts and desires.  
How the defective and deceptive values, loyalties, and longings  
of our self-centered nature and of this world **are in conflict**  
with allowing the Holy Spirit, God's presence in us,  
to guide us toward more Christ-like faithful living.

**They are,**  
**two fundamentally different & opposite ways and modes of living.**

By "flesh", Paul isn't referring to the flesh on our bones,  
but as a metaphor to describe our human tendency & drivenness  
to seek and possess things of immediate desire and pleasure.  
It's life under the domination of this world's ways and power,  
**that defy God's blessings, purpose, righteousness, truth and love.**

He's referring to the orientation and values **behind what we do & say,**  
the **things of this world that can drive and motivate us,** such as  
our need to satiate our pride & ego, & desire to acquire & impress,  
or even the things we fear or that make us feel anxious.  
**It's all distraction from what God intends for us along our walk of faith.**

Flesh, as he uses the term, describes when our lives are lived  
under the bondage of external wants, urges and worldly desires  
that can keep us self-centered, mine and me first orientation,  
and endlessly striving to prove our own value & worthiness.

Flesh is anything that can interfere or distract us from God,  
and all that can entice us away from God's Word, grace and promises.

**In sharp contrast,** the Spirit, refers to the Holy Spirit of God,  
the promised presence of God who indwells all Christians,  
who nudges, calls, speaks in prayer & opens Scripture to us.

**It is the Holy Spirit who creates a hunger and longing in us**  
**to grow deeper toward more authentic & faithful Christian living,**  
**toward the joyful, meaningful & abundant life God intends for us.**

In this passage, Paul's focus is on what motivates and drives us.  
Is it our fear, our wounds and desires of this corrupted world,  
or is it **gratitude and trust that God will do as promised,**  
**and accomplish in us what we cannot do for ourselves? ...**

... which as Paul explains to the Christians in Rome, vs. 6, 10-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ... if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The point is, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead,  
is the same Spirit present and powerful in us, and with us,  
**and who will most assuredly fully accomplish and complete**  
**all that God has promised and intends for us & through us.**

Through the Holy Spirit we have been and are being **grafted**  
**into the continuing love-story of God's grace and blessings...**

... which is the gradual process of the Spirit at work in our lives  
drawing us away from this world's defective ways and thinking  
toward entrusting ourselves to God's care, will and purpose.

This section of Paul's letter to the Christians living in Rome  
is about the implications of the Spirit on a Christian's life,  
the Holy Spirit indwelling, the ongoing presence of God.

The Spirit helps us think and see the world and other people in ways  
that are more consistent with the teachings of Scripture and Jesus.

But sometimes something captures the eye and entices,  
and draws our focus away from our relationship with Christ.

We want to get along, to win and succeed, to be liked and popular,  
so we compromise and let moral distinctions slip away until  
we settle for less truth and integrity than God demands.

A friend and classmate who worked at an embassy in Washington DC  
explained to me one time that he was required at least once a year  
to return to his homeland  
and spend some time back in his native country...

... because living in America and acclimating to our culture  
might cause members of embassy staff and their families  
to stray or forget their true homeland and loyalties.

We too can be distracted from our best and most faithful,  
fall into familiar, comfortable and compromised religious routine,  
our walk of faith can stray & grow stagnant & complacent with time.

So today, where am I along this adventure of faith that we call life?

The season of Lent is an ideal time to reflect & examine ourselves,  
and question, **what am I doing with this precious life given to me?**

Am I spiritually attentive & appreciative, am I focused or distracted  
and have I become too complacent, compromised or comfortable?

As we move through Lent toward Holy Week, let us reflect & reconsider,  
where am I right now and where am I headed **in my faith-walk with God?**

Has my faith and commitment, as Moses warned, grown easy and stale?  
We must not allow the abundance of God's kindness and blessings  
to distract or dissuade us from true Christian faithfulness.

We do want what God desires for us hopefully enough to make an effort,  
to move us deeper and further, to be more diligent in our faith,  
to respond well with gratitude and let God's grace guide.

I had a dear friend, a pastor and much older mentor early on who'd had  
a long and fruitful ministry, all of it served in just one church.  
As a young intern, I asked him one time,  
"how do you keep fresh & vital, how do you avoid stagnation?"

He said that what had worked for him,  
was to make the right little decisions, all along the whole way.

Don went on to explain,  
that in life we are constantly making small choices – minor things  
and the trick is to evaluate each choice and option  
in terms of faithfulness to God, obedience to God's word.

He found that in life, especially trying to live a Christian life,  
one choice will usually bring us a little closer to God,  
and the other, though easier, **probably won't.**

One choice requires stepping out in obedience and faith,  
while the other seems safer, more secure, **but isn't growth.**

One path leads to being more useful in building the kingdom of God  
and the other more likely pursues the goals & desires of this world.

He said it often comes down to our seemingly minor decisions in life,  
and it's not necessarily an obvious choice between good and evil  
but more likely, one way is a little more difficult & faithful,  
one a bit more gracious or worthy of a beloved child of God.  
One has to do with our desire, and the other **submission to God's will.**

He said, that the right path and option to choose,  
is the one that puts us in a place where God can best use us,  
for its in being used by God -- and walking with God,  
that keeps our faith fresh, growing, real & alive.

So to rekindle our commitment and our response to God's promises,  
**rather than just passing through this Lent half awake,  
strive toward Holy Week and Easter to be our very best,  
most meaningful and most fruitful of our Christian life.**

That's what is at stake today, and what is important this morning,  
which has everything to do with keeping our shared vision alive.

**So what if** at every crossroads, before every choice and decision,  
we evaluated and acted in faith and grace based upon  
what would best serve to draw us closer toward God?  
And ask ourselves, **what does the Word of God have to say about this?  
and is this what God wants and intends for me right now?**

**What if** every day we did look for ways to brighten someone else's day  
and each day, we tried to find some way to lighten someone's burden?

**These are challenging , confusing and changing times we live in.  
The future is uncertain and none of knows all that lies ahead.**

But like it or not, this is our world, our culture and circumstance,  
and **God has placed us here intentionally**, called us & equipped us  
to serve according to his will and purpose **for right here and now.**

As the Apostle Paul wrote: Colossians 2:6-7 (*The Message*)

My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. ... Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.