Not by bread alone

Deuteronomy: Choose Life | Week Ten | Deuteronomy 8:1-20

THE BIG IDEA

True life is not found in what we can provide for ourselves. It is found in trusting God for everything, in seasons of scarcity and in seasons of abundance. God led Israel through forty years of wilderness to teach them that people do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. He humbled them, and then he fed them. He tested them, and then he carried them. The lesson was never that they had to earn their bread. It was that the God who gave it had loved them first, and had never once let go.

01 BEGIN HERE

Before you open the passage, take a few quiet minutes and answer these for yourself.

1. Name a high point and a low point from your week.
2. Where have you seen God at work recently, and where has it been hard to see him at all?
3. Last time you sat down with this, you named one step to take. How did it go, and what got in the way?

02 SETTING THE SCENE

Israel is standing between two worlds. Behind them are forty years in the wilderness, and in front of them is a land of streams and wheat and olive oil, a place of real abundance. Moses uses this moment to answer a question the people have been carrying for a long time. Why the wilderness at all? What was God doing out there? His answer is that the wilderness was not punishment or abandonment. It was formation. God was teaching a people who had spent generations in slavery how to live as his children instead, with a trust in him that would hold up in hunger and, harder still, hold up in plenty. That is where this week sits in our series. We have spent these weeks learning to remember and learning to love. Chapter 8 asks whether that love can survive success.

03 READ THE WORD

Read the passage slowly. If you can, read it aloud to yourself, and read it twice.

DEUTERONOMY 8:1-20 CSB

1 Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and take possession of the land the LORD swore to your ancestors.

2 Remember that the LORD your God led you on the entire journey these forty years in the wilderness, so that he might humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

3 He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

4 Your clothing did not wear out, and your feet did not swell these forty years.

5 Keep in mind that the LORD your God has been disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.

6 So keep the commands of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and fearing him.

7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams of water, springs, and deep water sources, flowing in both valleys and hills;

8 a land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey;

9 a land where you will eat food without shortage, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you will mine copper.

10 When you eat and are full, you will bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

11 Be careful that you don't forget the LORD your God by failing to keep his commands, ordinances, and statutes that I am giving you today.

12 When you eat and are full, and build beautiful houses to live in,

13 and your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold multiply, and everything else you have increases,

14 be careful that your heart doesn't become proud and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

15 He led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, a thirsty land where there was no water. He brought water out of the flint rock for you.

16 He fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your ancestors had not known, in order to humble and test you, so that in the end he might cause you to prosper.

17 You may say to yourself, 'My power and my own ability have gained this wealth for me,'

18 but remember that the LORD your God gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm his covenant he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

19 If you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods to worship and bow in worship to them, I testify against you today that you will certainly perish.

20 Like the nations the LORD is about to destroy before you, so you will perish, because you would not obey the LORD your God.

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First impressions

4. What word, phrase, or image stood out to you as you read?

5. What did you notice this time that you had not noticed before, or what surprised you?

04 STUDY THE SCRIPTURE

The sermon walked through three ideas: obedience is the fruit of a heart that trusts God, relationship is the foundation of that trust, and remembering is what keeps the trust alive. Reread the verses named under each part as you go.

OBEDIENCE IS THE FRUIT OF TRUST

Read verses 1 and 6 again.

Moses opens and closes this section with the same instruction: keep the commands, walk in his ways. It would be easy to hear that as a transaction, as though obedience were the price of entry into the land. But look at the end of verse 1. The land was already promised. God swore it to their ancestors long before this generation was born. So obedience here is not how Israel earns the promise. It is what a trusting heart actually looks like from the outside. It is the fruit, not the root. Jesus warned often about people whose outward obedience covered an inward rebellion, which is why the middle of this passage matters more than the edges.

6. What is the difference between obeying God to earn something from him and obeying God because you already trust him? Where do you notice that difference in your own life?

7. Verse 1 says following God leads to life. Where has obedience actually opened up freedom or joy for you, rather than taking something away?

RELATIONSHIP IS THE FOUNDATION

Read verses 2 and 5 again.

Notice how verse 2 begins. Before Moses says a word about testing, he says the Lord your God led you, the entire journey, all forty years. The relationship comes first. Without it, the wilderness is just suffering with no author and no purpose. With it, the wilderness becomes something a Father walked his children through. Verse 5 makes that explicit. The Lord has been disciplining you as a man disciplines his son. The word behind discipline carries the sense of teaching through hardship, closer to instructing and correcting than to punishing. Parents restrain a toddler from the hot stove and the street not because they are angry, but because they want the child to live.

Verse 16 tells us where all of it was aimed. God humbled them and tested them so that in the end he might cause them to prosper. The testing was never the point. It was never about God finding out something he did not already know. It was about Israel finding out what was actually in their own hearts, so that the trust could go deeper than words.

8. It is easy to say that you trust God. What has actually tested that in you, and what did the test reveal?

9. Does thinking about God as a Father who teaches and corrects change how you read a hard season you are in now, or one you have already come through?

REMEMBERING BUILDS OUR TRUST

Read verses 3 and 4, then 14 through 18.

Verses 3 and 4 give the tangible evidence: manna they had never seen before, clothing that did not wear out, feet that did not swell over forty years of walking. Moses starts with the hunger before he gets to the bread, because remembering God as provider means first remembering that we needed providing for. Then comes the warning. When the houses are built and the herds are large and the silver has multiplied, the heart quietly grows proud and says, my power and my own ability gained this for me. That sentence is technically true and completely wrong at the same time. Verse 18 corrects it in a single line: he is the one who gives you the power to gain wealth. Forgetting is not usually rebellion. It is drift.

Remembering does not stay inside us. A people who remember being fed become a people who feed others. Scripture does not ask us only to tell the hungry about God, it asks us to give them something to eat. When we do that, we are not being charitable from a height. We are handing on the very thing we were handed, and we are rehearsing our own story every time we do it.

10. Where are you most tempted to say, I built this? What would it look like this week to name God as the giver instead?

11. Who around you is hungry, in the plain sense or otherwise? What is one concrete way you could feed someone this month?

05 BACK TO JESUS

This is not an extra step. It is where the whole passage has been heading.

Israel spent forty years in the wilderness and still failed the test. So did Adam and Eve, in a garden with everything they needed, choosing the word of a serpent over the word of God. Then Jesus, who was God, emptied himself and came to us as one of us. He was led into the wilderness for forty days with nothing to eat, and when the enemy told him to turn the stone into bread, he answered with this very verse. Man must not live on bread alone. Where we grasped, he let go. Where we forgot, he remembered. And he kept obeying all the way to a cross, so that the trust we could never sustain would be counted as ours. He is both the one who passed the test and the bread that feeds us now.

12. Jesus trusted his Father perfectly on your behalf. How does that change the way you face the wilderness you are in, or the abundance you are holding?

APPLICATION

What is God telling me to do today? Write down one specific step you will take this week.

06 PRAY

Bring this week to God, and name the step you just wrote down.

Prayer requests

A PRAYER TO CARRY WITH YOU

Father, you have led me the whole way, and I have not always known it. Where I am hungry, teach me to look to you. Where I am full, keep my heart from growing proud. Remind me that every good thing in my hands came from yours, and that even my strength to work is a gift. Feed me today with more than bread, in Jesus, Amen.

Before we gather again

Three things to carry into your week.

- Read Deuteronomy 8 again on your own, and ask God what he is saying to you in it.
- Take the one step you named, and tell someone you took it.
- Reach out to the person God brought to mind, and let someone know how it went.

07 NOTES AND REFLECTIONS