What Grace Makes of Us

Deuteronomy: Choose Life | Week Eleven | Deuteronomy 9:1–10:22

THE BIG IDEA

Israel is about to walk into the greatest success of their lives, and Moses warns them to be careful about the story they tell themselves. They did not receive the land because they were righteous. God went before them, mercy stood between them and judgment, and grace made room for them so they could make room for others. The question is not only whether we have received grace, but what kind of people grace is making us. Grace makes people who look back with gratitude when they succeed, come into the light when they fail, and make room for others when they belong, because God has already made room for us.

01 Share life

Take a few minutes to catch up with one another before you open the passage.

1. What was 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?
3. When we last met, we each named one step to take. How did it go, and what got in the way?

02 Setting the scene

We are in the second movement of Deuteronomy, where Moses is teaching Israel what it means to love God wholeheartedly. The wilderness is behind them and the Jordan River is in front of them. After forty years of waiting, they are finally about to enter the land God promised. But instead of a pep talk, Moses gives them a warning. When success comes, they will be tempted to believe they earned it. So he takes them back through their worst failure, the golden calf at Sinai, and reminds them that they are standing at the border only because God kept his promise and Moses pleaded for mercy on their behalf. Then in chapter 10, God renews the covenant and shows them what mercy is for. A people who have been given a place they did not deserve are now called to love the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, because they know what it is to be outsiders brought in by grace.

03 Read the Word together

Read this passage aloud together, slowly. If you can, read it twice, with a different person reading each time.

DEUTERONOMY 9:1-10:22 CSB

Open your Bibles together and read Deuteronomy 9:1 through 10:22. It is a long passage, so have several readers take a section each: 9:1–6, 9:7–21, 9:22–29, 10:1–11, and 10:12–22.

First impressions

4. What word, phrase, or image stood out to you as the passage was read?
5. What did you notice, or what surprised you, about the way Moses talks to Israel here?

04 Study the Scripture

The sermon walked through this passage in three movements: God goes before us, mercy stands between us and judgment, and grace makes room for others beside us. Work through each one in order, and reread the verses as you go.

GOD GOES BEFORE US

Read Deuteronomy 9:1–6 again.

Moses does not shrink the problem. The nations really are stronger and the cities really are fortified. These are the same giants that terrified Israel's parents forty years earlier. But Moses does not tell them they are stronger than they think. He tells them the LORD will cross over ahead of them. God goes first, and Israel is invited to join what God is already doing.

Then three times in three verses Moses shuts down the story Israel will be tempted to tell after they win: that God gave them the land because of their righteousness. God is acting to judge persistent wickedness and to keep the promise he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel is a stiff-necked people. The foundation of their future is not their faithfulness to God but God's faithfulness to his word.

6. The sermon said fear says "everything depends on me and I am not enough," and pride says "everything depended on me and I was enough." Which voice do you hear more often, and why?

7. Where in your life have you quietly started using a good gift (education, career, family, discipline, Bible knowledge) as evidence that you are better than someone else? What would it look like to tell the whole truth about how you got here?

MERCY STANDS BETWEEN US AND JUDGMENT

Read Deuteronomy 9:7–29 again.

On the edge of their greatest victory, Moses makes Israel remember their worst failure. While God was writing the covenant on the mountain, the people were melting their gold into a calf at the

bottom of it. They broke the covenant while God was still writing it. Moses is not trying to shame them. He is protecting them from pride, because a people who forget how much mercy they have needed become merciless toward others.

Notice how Moses prays in verses 26 and 27. He offers no defense of Israel. Every word is aimed at God: your people, your inheritance, you redeemed them, you made the promise. Moses stands between a guilty people and the judgment they deserve, but even Moses cannot pay for their sin because he is a sinner too. He points past himself to a greater mediator. Jesus did not just ask that judgment pass over us. He placed himself underneath it.

8. Why do you think Moses makes Israel remember the golden calf right before they enter the land? What happens to us when we remember only our blessings, and what happens when we remember only our failures?

9. What is the difference between conviction and condemnation? Is there a part of your story you have been keeping in the dark because you are afraid it would disqualify you? What would it take to bring it into the light?

GRACE MAKES ROOM FOR OTHERS BESIDE US

Read Deuteronomy 10:1–22 again.

God tells Moses to cut two new tablets and writes the same commandments on them. Mercy does not lower the standard, but it does give Israel a future. Verse 12 begins with "And now, Israel." After the calf and the shattered tablets, there is still an "and now." God is not finished with them. He calls them to fear him, walk in his ways, love him, and circumcise their hearts. And later in Deuteronomy 30:6, that command becomes a promise: God himself will do in them what they cannot do for themselves.

Then Moses describes the God who is calling them. He is the God of gods and Lord of lords, who cannot be bribed, and he spends his power on the orphan, the widow, and the resident alien. Because God loves the outsider, his people must love the outsider. Israel

knows what it is to be strangers in Egypt. God made room for them so they would make room for others. The people of God should be the people most able to say, "There is room beside me."

10. Grace does not only pardon us, it changes us. Where have you seen God softening a stiff-necked place in your own heart? Where do you still need him to?

11. Who is standing outside the belonging you now enjoy? Think of a new neighbor, a coworker, a single parent, a widow, or someone who has been coming to LOFT for weeks without a real relationship. What is one concrete way you could make room for them this week, even if it costs you time, convenience, or money?

05 Back to Jesus

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

Moses told Israel never to say the LORD brought them in because of their righteousness. In all of history, only one person could have said that without pride. Jesus alone trusted the Father completely. He was the faithful Son Israel failed to be. And yet he did not use his righteousness to keep his distance from unrighteous people. In Jesus, God went before us, walking into the battle we could not win. Jesus is the greater mediator, who did not simply plead for judgment to pass over us but bore it himself. And Jesus is the one who made room for us, welcoming the people others avoided and giving himself to bring outsiders into the family of God. We do not come to him because our record was good enough. We come because his righteousness has been given to us. We come with empty hands and receive everything from him.

12. The sermon named two voices that keep us from receiving grace: pride, which says "I do not really need this," and shame, which says "this could never be enough for me." Which one is louder for you right now, and how does the cross answer it?

APPLICATION

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

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06 Pray together

Share one request with the group and pray for one another, naming the step each person wrote down above.

Prayer requests

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A PRAYER TO CARRY WITH YOU

Father, you went before me long before I knew what I was facing, and every good thing in my hands came from yours. Forgive me for telling the story as if I got here on my own. Jesus, you stood between me and the judgment I deserved. Help me to stop hiding and to bring the pages I am ashamed of into your light, trusting that my sin does not have the final word. Holy Spirit, soften the stiff-necked places in me, and make my life spacious enough for the stranger, the lonely, and the one who cannot repay me. Make me the kind of person grace makes, grateful when I succeed, honest when I fail, and open when I belong, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Before we gather again

Here are three things to carry with you this week.

- Read Deuteronomy 9:1–10:22 again on your own and ask God what he is saying to you through it.
- Take the one step you named above and tell someone in the group you did it.
- Reach out to the person God brought to mind in question 11. We will talk about how it went next time.

07 Notes and reflections