

Forwards or Backwards?

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Date: 17 May 2026

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[0 : 00] This morning, if you have your Bibles, I encourage you to take it and turn to the Old Testament. We're going to start in Jeremiah, the book of Jeremiah this morning. I encourage you to turn to Jeremiah chapter 7 is where we're going to begin.

And this is kind of building on last week's sermon. And again, this message is, I was thinking about it this week. Chloe and Brady, this message is for the two of you.

But guess what? Well, it's for the rest of you as well and for me. So I want everybody just to say this morning, this message is for me. Because I need reminded of that sometimes.

We can sometimes hear a message or read God's Word and we think, oh man, my spouse, I'm glad they heard that this morning. They really needed that. Or we can think this person sitting next to me, they really needed that this morning.

They needed to hear that. But whenever we hear God's Word, it's for us, isn't it? Every one of us. And last week, what we talked about was the verse that I hope stuck in our minds.

[1 : 02] God was talking to His chosen people, the Israelites. And again, that was in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. And God's chosen people were the Jewish people. But as we get into the New Testament, that all changed with Christ coming.

With His birth, with His life, with His teaching, with His death on the cross, with His resurrection, who became God's people at that point in time? Whoever puts their hope and trust in Jesus.

Those become God's chosen people. So if you have your trust and hope in Jesus Christ this morning, you are part of God's chosen people. And what we looked at last week was where it talked about the Israelites forgetting about God.

But you know what God said to them? I will not forget you. And that's a wonderful thought that I hope we remember always that God will not forget about us.

There may be times in our lives when we feel lonely, when we feel alone, when we feel like everybody is against us, when we feel like the world is against us. But we have promises like that, where God says, I have not forgotten about you.

[2 : 11] I am with you and I will not leave you nor forsake you. So God does not forget about us. But what sometimes is the problem?

I don't think God is capable of forgetting about us. We, on the other hand, are very capable of forgetting about God.

Aren't we? And that is what we're going to talk about a little bit this morning. Because especially for our seniors, but for the rest of us, that is really the key to life.

You know, if we want a full life, if we want a good life, and we're going to read it here in a moment, part of that is not forgetting about God. Making sure that we always include Him as a part of our life. So look in Jeremiah chapter 7. We're going to begin reading in verse 22. And I'm going to ask if you would stand, if you're able, as we read God's Word together this morning. Jeremiah chapter 7, beginning in verse 22.

[3 : 11] And this is what it shares. Verse 22. For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burned offerings or sacrifices.

But this thing I commanded them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people, and walk you in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward.

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt, to this day I have even sent to you all my servants, the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they hearkened not to me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck, and they did worse than their fathers.

Let's pray together this morning. Lord God, thank you again for your presence in this place. Lord, we thank you for all the kids that are here. We thank you for our graduates this morning. Lord, we thank you for each person that's in this place.

[4 : 19] And Lord, we know that your Word this morning is for every one of us. So I pray that we would have ears that are open, that we would have just a desire to hear what you have to share with us this morning. So let your Word work in our hearts and in our lives.

And it's in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray and all God's family said, Amen. You can be seated this morning. You know, you look at these verses, and God has a lot to say to the Israelites. But again, remember that this is also what God has to say to us. And it begins in verse 22. He said, I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt.

You know, the Israelites had been in Egypt. They had been in bondage. They had been in slavery for 400 years. And God brought them out of that. He gave them freedom.

And what He is saying is, the first thing I talked to them about was not burnt offerings and sacrifices. That was not God's primary thing that He wanted them to know.

[5 : 17] What was the primary thing God said to them? Well, it's in the next verse, in verse 23. But this thing commanded I them.

This is what God wanted from them. Obey Me, obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people, and walk you in all the ways that I have commanded you.

God was saying that that was His desire. Is that that complicated? What is God saying there?

Listen to me and do what I say.

Is that hard to understand? Is it hard to understand? I only heard one no. Is that hard to understand? Okay. It's easy to understand. Is it as easy to do as it is to understand?

You know, we are told lots of times in life, do what I tell you to do. If you're a parent, how many times have you said that to your child? And you expect that, don't you?

[6 : 17] Now, do you always get that? We know as parents, you don't always get that. Even if we have good children, we don't always get that.

But God is saying that's what He wanted from them, that you would obey My voice. Do the things that I ask you to do. And for graduates and for all of us this morning, that's what God wants from us. Just to listen and to obey what He says in your Word. And you know what He says after that? Look at what He says at the end of that verse, the end of verse 23.

That it may be well with you. Do we understand that's what God wants it to be like in our lives? He wants us to be well. He wants it to go well for us.

It doesn't mean He wants things to be easy for us. But He wants us to do well. He wants us to have full lives that are full of love, that are full of faith, that are full of hope.

[7 : 15] That is what God wants from us. That's what it means when God says that it will be well with you. That was His desire for them. And that is God's desire for us. That when we listen to His voice, you know, we always think about graduation and you hear graduation speakers and they share a lot of things, a lot of words of wisdom, a lot of advice, right?

But folks, this is the greatest piece of advice that there can be. And it's not my words, it's what God says. Follow my Word and it will be well with you.

You want a good life? Follow God's Word. Again, something that's not hard to understand. But the problem lies in the fact that sometimes we fail to do that, don't we?

And you look on to what God says right after that in verse 24 and it starts with that wonderful word, but. God just said, obey my voice and it will be well with you, but they hearkened not.

What does that mean? They chose not to listen. They hearkened not nor inclined their ear. And here's the first problem.

[8 : 24] There's three problems we're going to talk about this morning and this is the first one. So they didn't listen to God. What did they do instead of that? It's a choice. What choice did they make?

They didn't listen to God. They instead did what? They did evil. That is true. Listen to this part. So whose ways did they follow?

God's? No. Whose ways did they follow? Their own. Are we ever guilty of that? What does it mean to follow your own heart?

I mean, that sounds like good advice, doesn't it? And it might maybe advice you've even heard. Follow your heart. Go where your heart leads you. Doesn't that sound like good advice? No. I mean, on the surface it does. But that means we're following our own way. It means we're following our own thinking. What we want to do in our lives.

[9 : 27] That's exactly what they did. And is it saying that that was a good thing? No. The best advice is not follow your heart. The best advice is follow God.

Don't follow your heart where it leads you. Follow God where He leads you. The first problem is we are often so eager to follow our own heart.

To get what we want. To put our needs, our wants, our desires first. That is not the path to happiness. To joy and to a full life. Again, often the world will teach you, well, if you just do what you want and do the thing that you want to do, that that's where you're going to find peace and joy.

Folks, that's not right. When we are doing what God wants us to do, that's where real peace and joy comes from. Their problem was they followed their own heart.

And to me, it's really interesting what it says at the end of this verse. They followed their own evil heart and went backwards, not forward.

[10 : 31] Is that a problem? I mean, as we think about life, typically you want to go forwards in life, right? When you go backwards, what is that?

What is going backwards? I mean, if my goal is to get from here to over there and I'm going that way, what does that tell you? I'm never going to get where I want to be, am I?

Going backwards, you're never going to get where you want to go. And that was a problem with the people. They thought following their own ways would get them where they want to go. Folks, that is not the way it works.

The world will say that, but that is not what God's Word says. Following our own ways will only lead us backwards. Graduates, Chloe and Brady, I want you guys to go forward in your lives.

But it's not just them. Every one of you, God wants you to keep moving forward because He has wonderful things along the way. But whenever we begin to follow our own thoughts, our own desires, instead of moving closer toward those, we're just kind of backing away.

[11 : 32] We're going backwards and backwards means further and further from God. Problem number one, when we follow our own way, we go backwards.

And do you know why we sometimes follow our own way? It identifies that too. I want you to look in verse 26. Yet they hearken not to me.

In other words, they didn't listen nor incline their ear. This is a biblical expression. We don't really use it today. It says they hardened their neck. Has anybody ever told you, you are just hardening your neck?

I mean, we don't use that expression. What does it mean? It's not hard. Hard-headed, stubborn, egotistical, don't want to change.

Is that ever us? Are we ever stubborn? In wanting what we want, period? Are you ever stubborn? Are you ever?

[12 : 38] I ask that as a real question. I want you to, are you ever stubborn? Absolutely. I see some of you looking right at your spouse and you want to answer for them really, really badly.

But the reality is, folks, that's all of us. We can be stubborn in our lives because we want what we want. That is something that is common to all of humanity, not just you, not just your spouse, not just me, all of us.

We can be stubborn at times and wanting our own way instead of God's way. And you know I have you do this sometimes, but look at the person beside you and say, you can be stubborn. Tell them. Go ahead, tell them.

You know what? They just shared something with you. They just shared something with you that whether you like to hear it or not is true. You can be stubborn.

And I can be stubborn. And we have a choice to make. We can either be stubborn in not following God and wanting to do it our own way, or we can say, all right, God, whatever you want, wherever you want me to go, whatever you want me to be doing.

[13 : 46] That is what God desires. And whenever we fight against that, that's the stubbornness inside of us. And we will end up going backwards and not forwards. So problem number one, we want to do it our own way.

Second problem that they had, I want you to turn to another scripture. It's in Psalms. Psalms chapter 72, or 78, excuse me. Psalms chapter 78.

I'll give you a minute to flip there. I know it'll be back here behind me too. But Psalms 78, beginning in verse 40. Talking about God's people again.

Beginning in verse 40. How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness and grieve Him in the desert?

Yea, they turned back and tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not His hand, nor the day when He delivered them from the enemy.

[14:47] How He had wrought His signs in Egypt and His wonders in the field of Zohan. Again, it's talking about when God brought them out of slavery in Egypt. Where were they at at this point in time?

Where is it talking about? First couple words. Where are they at? In the wilderness. What does that mean to be in the wilderness?

Lost. There's animals there. Is it easy or hard? And that was their problem. God had led them out of Egypt, but they were in the wilderness.

And you know what? They struggled at times. And they questioned. And they didn't always like where they were at because it was hard. They didn't know where they were going to get water from at one point.

They didn't know where they were going to get food from at one point. They worried about shelter and clothing. They worried about all those things because life wasn't easy. And the problem is when they were in the wilderness, when they were in those difficult times, what does it say that they did?

[15:53] What does it say? I'll give you a minute. They tempted God. Look in verse 42. They did not remember.

They forgot. They forgot. They forgot that God was the one that says, I will not forget you. They forgot that God had said, I will take care of you. That God had led them out of Egypt and He was going to continue to take care of their needs.

They forgot that when things got hard. Problem number two, they forgot about God when things were hard. Is that ever us?

Are our lives ever hard? You may not be physically in the wilderness. You're not stuck out in the middle of the woods. But are your lives ever hard? Do you ever get news that you didn't want to get? Do you ever go through things that you don't want to go through?

Do you ever have physical problems, financial problems, relationship problems, family problems, job problems? Do you ever have any of those? That's the wilderness. Things are not always easy.

[17:01] And in those times, do you know what can happen? We can forget about God. We can maybe even become angry at God. God's people, the Israelites, they at times got angry at God.

God, why did you lead us out here in the middle of nowhere? Yeah, sure, we were in slavery back there, but look now, we're in the middle of the wilderness. And they weren't happy.

They forgot that their God was a God that said, I will take care of you. And you know what, when they were in the wilderness, do you know what God did? He took care of them. He gave them manna on the ground and things to eat.

He brought water out of a rock with Moses so they had something to drink. God took care of their needs. But you know what they had done before that? Complain. Problem number two, when we go through difficult times, it's easy to forget about God.

I don't know what you're going through right now. Now, I'm guessing most of us have been through at least one difficult time in our lives, if not more. The other thing that I can almost guarantee is we will go through difficult times in the future.

[18:07] We don't like to think about it, but isn't that true? Don't forget about God. In the difficulty, in the wilderness, know that God loves you and God says, I will not forget you.

The challenge is not to forget God. Problem number two, in the difficulty, in the wilderness, they forgot about God. Problem three, look to Deuteronomy.

I know we're looking at several places this morning. Look in Deuteronomy chapter 8. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Chapter 8, beginning in verse 10.

Problem number one, they follow their own way. Problem number two, they forgot about God when they were in times of difficulty. Problem number three is here in Deuteronomy 8, beginning in verse 10. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land

which He has given you.

Beware that you forget not the Lord your God in not keeping His commandments and His judgments and His statutes, which I command you this day. Lest when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and dwelled therein, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and your gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart is lifted up and you forget that the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage.

[19 : 33] So again, He's talking about the fact that I led you out of Egypt, led you out of slavery. And now it's not talking about when they were in the wilderness, but when is it talking about?

Not when things were hard, but when things are good. Now we've looked to the whole other end of the scale. Problem number three is they forgot about God when things were good too.

And that is a challenge that you and I can face. Not just when it's difficult that sometimes we forget about God, but sometimes when everything is going well, we forget about God. We just think, oh, things are going great.

I'm involved in all this and that and I'm busy and life is good. And in the midst of that, we forget about God. We let other priorities sneak in and take the time and the energy that we should be giving to God.

Is that a challenge for you and I today? Yeah, I think for us as Americans living in the United States, we're blessed, aren't we? Most of us don't worry where our next meal is coming from.

[20 : 38] Most of us eat too much instead of not enough, right? Right? All right. Let's be honest with each other. We have homes to live in. We have cars to drive.

We have jobs to go to. We may wish we had more money, but compared to most of the world, guess what? We've got a lot. And in the midst of all that goodness God has given us with, how many times do we forget about Him?

Do we let all those good things that seem like good things get us going backwards because we've forgotten about God? In the good times, they also forgot about God.

And in the good times, in our success, sometimes we can forget about God. So we can follow our own way. In the bad times, we can forget God.

In the good times, we can forget God. The problem is we just plain sometimes forget God, don't we? But for all of us, we need to understand. God will not forget us.

[21 : 39] And His challenge to us is God is saying, don't forget me. I want to read one final verse. You can turn there if you want. You don't need to. But it's in Job chapter 8.

And I want to share this verse because for graduates and for all of us, it's important that we understand this. Job chapter 8, beginning in verse 11, says this. Can a rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water? It's talking about plants there. And it's saying that, you know, it's talking about a rush. You know what they need to be in? They're kind of those things you see at the edge of water, at the edge of a pond.

What do they need to be in? Mud and water. If that all dries up, what happens? They die. And it talks about flag, again, talking about another type of plant.

Can it grow without water? Can plants grow without water? No. They wither. They die. While it is yet, in verse 12, While it is yet in His greenness, and not cut down, it withers before any other herb.

[22 : 47] So are the paths of all that forget God. And the hypocrite's hope shall perish. There is a price to be paid when we forget about God.

That's just reality, folks. It's not my words. It's what God's Word is saying. When we forget about God, there is a price to be paid. It says here it's like a plant that doesn't get any more water. A plant without water, we know what happens.

It withers. And it shrivels up. And it dies. For you and I, graduates, for all of us, don't forget about God.

Keep your eyes on Him. Follow His ways, not your own. In times of difficulty, follow God. In times when things are great, follow God.

What is the theme there? Follow God. Always. Always. Put Him first in your lives. And when you do that, you're going to be like a plant that's getting plenty of water, that's growing and flourishing.

[23 : 52] That's God's desire for you and I. But it's our choice whether we follow God or not. God will not forget about us. Let's make sure we do not forget about God in our lives.

Let's pray. Lord God, we thank You again for this day that You've given us. And we thank You for Your Word. And Lord, it shares with us so clearly that we need to be careful we do not forget about You. Lord, for the ones that are graduating, they have a lot of life in front of them. Wonderful things that You have to bring. They'll have some difficulty as well. But Lord, in the midst of all of it, I pray that You would just help them to always follow You and to never forget about You. And for every one of us that's here, the same is true. Help us never to forget about You, but help us to follow You in times when it's tough, in times when it's good, and everything in between. You will not forget us. Help us not to forget You. And Lord, when we do that, it will be well with us. That's a promise You give us. Thank You for that, Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. Amen.