

Keeping Pressing Into Who You Are

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[0 : 00] So, as I said, we're reading from Deuteronomy this morning.! That's what's going on.

It's basically Moses reminding people of what God's way is. Where are Israel at this point? Now, if you were here for the numbers bit, you'll remember, after God frees his people from slavery in Egypt, he takes them through the desert towards the promised land.

And some things happen in numbers, you might remember. And out the other end of numbers, that's where we are at the beginning of Deuteronomy. And if you can see this map here of the Middle East, you can see the sort of the journey of the Exodus, where they started in Egypt, and then down to Mount Horeb.

That's right at the bottom of the map there in big red letters. And then they've gone up again, and they're sort of... And they are where the big red circle is. So, if you can see the word Edom and Moab, top right, in between there, that's where Israel are sitting right now.

So, actually not that far from Mount Horeb. Here's another map just to help us. So, this you might recognise as a map of Israel in Old Testament times. And there's just a few things I've highlighted there.

[1 : 34] One is Kadesh Barnea. That's bottom left. See the arrow there? That gets mentioned in our reading. So, this is kind of a little bit up from the map that we saw before. And the other thing that I've highlighted there is, you can see, very small text.

The Way of Mount Seir, which is a sort of a dotted red line, which starts bottom right. And goes up the page. And that's mentioned in our text as well. And the direction of their journey is that big red up arrow into the land of Israel.

So, as we read, bear those maps in mind. Bear in mind who they've come out of the desert wandering years. This is Moses standing on the threshold and sharing God's words with his people. John, thank you. A reading is from Deuteronomy chapter 1.

It will be found on page 178 of the Church Bible. But you won't find 178 because it's the title on that page. So, look for 179.

[2 : 39] Deuteronomy chapter 1, verses 1 to 18. These are the words Moses spoke to Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan.

That is in the Arabah, opposite Suf, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazoroth and Dizabab. It takes 11 days to go from Horeb to Kegel, by the Mount Seir road.

In the 40th year, on the first day of the 11th month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him concerning them.

This was after he had defeated Sion, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, and at Edrei, had defeated Og, the king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth.

East of the Jordan, in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying, The Lord our God said to us at Horeb, You have stayed long enough at this mountain.

[3 : 57] Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites. Go to all the neighbouring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev, and along the coast, in the land of the Canaanites, to the Lebanon.

As far as the great river, the Euphrates. See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their descendants after them.

At that time, I said to you, You are too heavy a burden for me to carry alone. The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky.

May the Lord, the God of your ancestors, increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised. But how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself?

Choose some wise, understanding, and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you. You answered me, What you propose to do is good.

[5 : 25] So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens, and as tribal officials.

And I charged your judges at that time. Hear the disputes between your people, and judge fairly, whether the case is between two Israelites, or between an Israelite and a foreigner residing among you.

Do not show partiality in judging. Hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of anyone, for judgment belongs to God.

Bring me any case that is too hard for you, and I will hear it. And at that time, I told you everything you were to do.

May the Lord add his own blessing in the public reading of his word. Amen. Thank you, John. We're going to spend some time trying to understand that passage of Scripture, but before we do that, let's stand and sing.

[6 : 41] Let's stand and sing from the breaking of the dawn about God's promises. Let's stand and sing from the breaking of the dawn.

On the breaking of the dawn, near the setting of the sun, I will stand on every promise of God. Let's stand and sing from the moment. I must have to say that no matter does our way, I will stand on every promise of your heart.

For your heart will be sure that all days I am secure, I can stand on every promise of your heart. When I stumble and I sing, condemnation, blessing in your heart, I will stand on every promise of your heart.

[8 : 02] You are faithful, O dear, that in freedom I might live, so I stand on every promise of your heart.

We'll pray in the love of God, we'll end up the sins of God, so I'll come on every promise of your heart.

When I'm paid with angry choice, I will listen for your voice, and I'll stand on every promise of your heart.

Through this love and troubled life, you will guide me with your heart. As I stand on every promise of your heart.

When I'm paid with angry choice, I will stand on every promise of your heart. I will stand on every promise of your heart.

[9 : 28] Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life.

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Through this love and troubled life. Through this love and troubled life.

! Through this love and troubled life.! All alone, full of doubt but others' doubt. Unnuy■■■■ for every promise of you.

Taste the wish, grace will be. Taste the wish, grace will be. We will find for every glory in your glory Lord, we pray as we come to your word that you would help us to stand on every promise that you give us in that word.

In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Do sit down, have that passage open in front of you, follow along as we work our way through it.

[10 : 46] I wonder how many of you have had to give somebody a reminder this week. Put your hand up if you've had to give somebody a reminder of something this week.

Quite a lot of hands going up. How many of you have needed somebody to remind you of something this week? Yes, come on, all the hands should be up, shouldn't they?

I've had to be reminded this week that my children are not adults. And that I need to set my expectations accordingly. Sometimes we need to be reminded to be on time, don't we?

Sometimes we need to be reminded to smile. It's something we all need. But actually, if you think about it, nobody is under a duty to give us a reminder, are they?

So if I get caught speeding, I'm sure that's never happened to any of you. If I get caught speeding and the police officer stops me and he lets me off with a reminder that speeding is against the law, that actually, he doesn't owe me that, does he?

[11 : 44] That's a grace, if that comes. It's not a grumble. And maybe you're thinking when you heard, oh, we're looking at Deuteronomy this morning, maybe you thought, as I do sometimes, oh no, not more Old Testament law.

Or why do we even need two of these books? You know, you could have just said it once and be done with it. We need more grace. Parents, well, parents, if you ever find yourself saying something twice, like, for instance, be careful on the stairs.

Don't run up and don't have a fight on the stairs. Don't try and tickle your brother or sister on the stairs. Or if you've ever had that said to you by your parents, you'll know that that is a reminder in the context of relationship, isn't it?

You say that because you love them, because you're concerned about their safety. And that's what it is like when God reminds his people of his ways. That's the tone we should hear here.

If God was an angry, judgmental God, he would have said something like this, wouldn't he? I've given you my law already. Oh, you didn't listen? Too bad. But that's not what God does.

[12 : 55] Instead, the Father graciously reminds his covenant people of his ways. So when we think boring repetition of rules, really what he's saying is, I want to remind you to keep being who you are with me.

So Deuteronomy is a restatement of God's covenant way. He's saying keep pressing in to who you are. You might be thinking, I've read that passage. How is this a reminder?

Well, let's start at verse 1. These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel. So here is a record of what Moses has already said. And then when Moses starts speaking, he says, I'm telling you again what I already told you at Sinai from God.

So if you want to find those, verse 3, verse 6, verse 9, verse 16, verse 18, all give us the clue that this is Moses retelling God's way. It's a bit like a liturgy almost.

You know, we say good things that are true so that they sink deep into our hearts. That's liturgy. But what about us? There's no Moses around, is there?

[14 : 04] But we do have a Moses. He just has a different name. And we have family values too in God's church, don't we? And we have a relationship with our Father, and he wants to protect us and lovingly remind us.

So this reminder is for us. What's the message today? Jesus wants to remind us to keep pressing in to who we are and to remember his promised presence with us.

I'll say that again. Jesus wants us to remember, wants us to remind us to keep pressing in to who we are and remember his promised presence with us. So I said it was a reminder, and I said it was a gracious reminder, but how do we know that it's a gracious reminder?

It's clearly a reminder. Well, the answer lies in the detail. And each detail of this beginning part shows us God's undeserved kindness to his people.

So looking again at verse 1, these are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness of the Jordan. So he speaks to Israel, to all Israel in the wilderness, which is meant to remind us of what has gone before.

[15 : 16] These are the people that God has freed from slavery and oppression in Egypt. And he's led them through difficult circumstances in the wilderness. He has chosen them, not because they're better than everybody else.

It says that explicitly in Deuteronomy. But because he chose them, because he loved them. He adopted them because he loved them. And where are they? Verse 2.

So opposite Suf, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab, it takes 11 days to go from Mount Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road. And that's where they are.

So you remember the maps? They're 11 days from Sinai. They're in Moab, east of the Jordan River, on the border of the Promised Land. And each of the commentators tells us that Israel actually rebelled against God in every place mentioned here.

Every single one. But God is still here, with his family, on the doorstep of the Promised Land. That's grace, isn't it? Verse 3.

[16:24] In the 40th year, on the first day of the 11th month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him concerning them. So I've just heard that it's 11 days from Mount Sinai, Mount Horeb, to the border of the Promised Land.

But here we are, 40 years later. And that itself is a story, isn't it? It's only an 11-day journey. But it's taken them 40 years. If you know your Bible, you'll know why.

It's because they've spent 40 years in the wilderness, revealing their unfaithfulness, learning how to be obedient, forgetting who they are with God.

And God has given them a 40-year timeout. But do you know what? For every second of those 40 years, God has sat on the naughty step next to them. He hasn't left them for a moment, has he? Isn't that grace? Isn't that grace? When I put my kids on the naughty step, or when I was put on the naughty step, even when I was small, I don't often remember the parents sitting there next to me.

[17:29] I have done that a bit more recently, because I think it's a good thing to do. But 40 years, sitting on the naughty step next to his child. Amazing. Who are these words from?

Well, they're from Moses, aren't they? And in fact, if you read on through Deuteronomy, they're his final words before he dies, because he doesn't get to go into the promised land. And so this isn't a kind of a final warning letter.

You know the ones you get from, I don't know, the council or some agency or an organisation, and it has a heading and some red letters and things. And you think, I don't know, he sent that to some person who works for some organisation.

This is not that. These are Moses' final words to the people he has led through the desert, who he spoke up for before the Lord, even though he didn't share in their mistakes.

So again, this isn't God's angry, you didn't do what I told you. This is a gracious reminder from a loving leader.

[18:32] And of course, that Moses is supposed to point us to somebody, supposed to point us to Jesus. And what is Moses talking about? Well, verse five, Moses began to expound this law, the things that God had said to him.

That's God's way. So Moses is reminding them of the family identity. Who we now are in him looks like this. That's what Moses is talking about.

And we need those reminders, don't we? Not just of his way, but of his love. And those reminders are grace to us. If you think about it, practically everything we do as human beings is governed by some sort of an agreement or a code, isn't it?

There's the highway code. And if you go to school, there's a kind of a behavioural code there. And most businesses have a code of conduct or something like that. And even families actually work or don't work, usually because the parents have agreed how it's going to go.

So there again. And so when God, through Moses, turns to his adopted family on the doorstep of the promised land, what does he say? He says, I want us to be happy here.

[19:41] Let's remind ourselves of the things that we said would make us happy here. That's tough for us to hear today, isn't it? Because actually we don't really like rules and authority has got a bad name.

But that makes sense because just imagine for a minute if I was interested in adopting a child, but I somehow thought that going through the paperwork of adopting that child was all there was to bringing that child into my family and helping them to grow up in a healthy way.

And if I said, off you go, I've signed the paperwork now, I'm sure we'll be fine. And I didn't give any thought to their guidance or their growth as a person or things that would safeguard them.

Would that be love? This is a gracious reminder, isn't it? I think sometimes I resent reminders.

And I kind of think this, I kind of think, yeah, I know that. And of course the reminder is given not because I don't know it, but because sometimes I don't do it. And that's really the cause of my resentment, but because when someone reminds me, I realise, oh yeah, no, actually I haven't been doing that.

[20:57] We have a resentful of God's reminders about his ways. Do I react like a sulky child?

Remember that when God reminds us, it is grace and it is love because he wants us to be well in him. Just take a moment, think, what has God reminded me of recently?

Or perhaps what is God reminding you of right now? How did you react? How are you reacting as God reminds you of something? So we have a gracious reminder.

What is the reminder about? We've been talking about it already. It's a reminder to keep pressing into who we are in God. Let's look at verse 5.

Moses is explaining the law. What does he say? What does God want? What are our first steps to following him, pressing into our ministry?

[22 : 11] Verse 6. You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break, camp, and advance. In other words, Moses is saying, we need to move.

Let's go higher up. It's no good sitting still. We need to go further in. Sitting still is not who we are. That's stagnating. So if you want to translate that into our vision of Bethel for a moment, believing and belonging is really only one part, isn't it?

Just as much part of who we are and what we want to do is the growing and going. Think of it in terms of old age.

I've been thinking of this more recently. And when I think about old age approaching, I think actually it's not the keeping going that causes the problems, is it? When you're walking or running or whatever it is that you're doing, the keeping going is okay.

It's when you stop that's when the problems come. That's really what Moses is saying, what the Lord is saying to us here. Keep going.

[23 : 22] Don't stop. Keep pressing in to who you are. Verse 8. See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants after them.

See, the land was already theirs, God's saying, it's yours. But now you have to go and take it. I read this verse and I thought, what do you mean? If you've already given it to me, why do I need to go and take it?

I don't understand. Kez and I bought our first home. Seems like a long time ago now. And believe it or not, I'm one of those sad cases that keeps records of these things.

So, there you go. That's the picture from the brochure. And we looked at it and we thought, what a mess. It's completely overgrown.

And the interior, Kez will tell you, was definitely somebody else's. Not ours. The name on the title deeds, you know, when we'd done all the mortgage bit, that was ours. So, it belonged to us.

[24 : 25] But in some sense, until we'd actually gone in, lived in it, renovated it, in some sense, it's not ours. That's what's going on here.

Isn't it? Imagine you get given a new locker at school for a minute. They give you the key, but until you actually go and you unlock it and you pull out all the stuff that the last person left behind and you put your bag in and poster of whatever band it is, you guys probably don't even do posters anymore, but poster of whatever band it is, goes up.

Is it really yours? God is asking us to intentionally inhabit our identity. That's what he wants, to continually press into who we are in the Lord Jesus.

The fact that we're adopted and safe and forgiven and free and holy and whole. He wants us to lean into that. It's kind of the difference between being something and realizing what that means and leaning into it.

So, I had a doctor friend who once said to me, do you know what? I never realized what it meant to be a doctor until I saved someone's life. That was the day I realized. And I said to him, I never realized what it was to be a goalkeeper at school until a penalty ball hit me in the face.

[25 : 50] His example is better, isn't it? It's the same thing, really. We're not called to sit still and just believe what God says we are.

We're called to intentionally inhabit that. Keep pressing into who we are. So, we're talking about the land, aren't we? For Israel, the land was their possession.

What's the significance of the land? the trees, the earth? No, that's not the significance. You know your Bibles, you know.

The significance of the land is that God was there. This is where God said he would be with his people. That's the significance of it, isn't it? What's the significance for us?

Well, our inheritance in Jesus is the same. It is that we are free to live permanently in God's presence. Already now, fully in heaven.

[26 : 50] So, we keep pressing into who we are. We do that by being in his presence more and more. by bringing him into more and more of our lives.

Asking him to be more and more present in our hearts. That's how we do pressing into who we are. So, I wonder where you are right now in your relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Do you still think of him as just sort of a bunch of rules that you've got to follow? Or do you think of him as someone who wants you in his presence permanently? I think if you haven't yet made the decision to follow him, then you're still stuck at Mount Horeb, which is where we all start.

And God would say to you, you have been long enough at this mountain. And he wants you rather to move towards a different mountain. One where there is a cross.

Where all God's promises are kept. Where Jesus died for us. Where our sin was dealt with. Where that adoption that Israel had was made possible for us. Maybe you're in the wilderness.

[28 : 03] That's where Israel have just been. They were there not listening. Maybe you're in the wilderness. And God says, break camp and advance.

Stop what you're doing. Move. Because you don't want to be left in the wilderness forever. Or maybe, thank the Lord, you are excitedly standing on the banks of the Jordan looking at the promised land.

Eager to go deeper into his presence. And God says to you, go in and take possession of what is yours. It's yours. How can Israel do this?

How can we move forward with being with Jesus? How can we keep pressing in to who we are? Is it try harder? Keep going? Serve more?

No. We can only do it by remembering God's promised presence. We can do that because of the promises made by God and the promises kept by God and the victory won by God because of who he is.

[29 : 17] Because he is the promise-keeping God who has given us all of this already. And it's right here in this passage. Verse 4. This was after God defeated Sion, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon.

Andrei had defeated Og, king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. See, the enemies who stood between God and himself and his people and his land had been defeated already.

All of that land east of the Jordan had been given to the two and a half tribes. Do you remember those from the Old Testament? He had already defeated them. In fact, we praised God for their defeat at the beginning.

Do you recognise those names from the psalm that we read together? And those victories mean that east of the Jordan is already theirs and those victories are reflected for us in the cross.

Because we're not about conquering lands anymore, are we? It's at the cross that the power of evil is broken, where death is defeated and where the penalty for sin is lifted.

[30 : 24] That victory is already won. The rest of this is just skirmishes. So we can press into who we are because he's already won the victory. Look at verse 8.

See how I've given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to their descendants after them. This is the land he promised to Abraham.

Everything east of the Jordan he's already given to them. And if you read the rest of Deuteronomy, he gives them the rest too. He keeps his promises. And as surely as he keeps that promise, he will keep his promise to us to bring us home.

Something else going on here, isn't there? That's section verses 9 to 18. Moses says, at that time I said to you, you are too heavy a burden for me to carry alone.

And verse 12 he says something very similar. Why can't Moses cope with the volume of work anymore? You wonder that? The reason is, the reason why they needed these new arrangements is because God's family had got bigger.

[31 : 34] Verse 10, the Lord God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky. What was God's promise to Abraham again? I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

And as surely as God has kept that promise, he will keep his promise to save more children for himself and to stay with us until all of his promises are fulfilled. There's also a wonderful sketch of leadership here that we don't have time to go into but we'll reward a bit of study if you've got time. But we need to finish don't we? You guys ever been to a marriage renewal ceremony? Those wedding vows? I used to hear that and I thought I don't get that.

You know, why do you need to make the promise again? Unless you've broken it, of course. Then there might be a reason to do it again. Surely, if you've made the promise, you've made the promise.

Right? Now the job is keeping it. But then someone told me the story of a man who on his wedding day said to his wife, I love you and if that ever changes, I'll let you know.

[32 : 46] And then the rest of his marriage just never bothered saying, I love you again. That doesn't really work, does it?

Now I'm not advocating for renewing your marriage vows, but I kind of get now why God renews his covenant here. Do you? That's what he's doing.

He's saying again, that thing I said I would do, that agreement we made together. I'm reminding you of that again. Every time he restates his law and his promises, what is he saying?

He's saying, I do. I still do. And we need to hear that voice, don't we? If we're going to keep pressing into who we are, we're going to deal with all the rubbish in the wilderness and the challenges ahead and the fact that we actually haven't kept our promise since we made it.

If we're going to deal with all of that, and go in and take possession, then we need to hear him saying, I still do.

[33 : 54] So that's what I would love you to take away from this morning, if nothing else. Whatever happened in your life in the last 40 years or the last 40 minutes, I don't care, God says, I still do.

And that is how we keep pressing in, how we keep holding the hand that holds ours, because God says, I still do. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that when you remind us of things, that is grace.

Help us not to resent your reminders. Lord, and we thank you that you call us to go deeper in to who we are in you. and we thank you that you bring to our minds and you present to us your promises, all of them kept in Jesus according to the New Testament.

And that you say to us that you still do. Please, will you help us to receive that and live out of it? In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.