

No Ordinary Man Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Two men were talking one day over lunch. The first man said: “My wife has a terrible memory – the worst memory I ever heard of.” The second man said: “Forgets everything, huh?” And the first man said: “No! Remembers everything!”

Most of us are the other way around. We are so forgetful. We just have a lot of trouble remembering things... and as a result we've to come up with all kinds of creative ways to remind us of what we need to be doing.

- Some, of course, use the classic reminder of “tying a string around your finger.”
- I've known people that call themselves on the telephone and leave themselves a message on voice mail or their home answering machine.
- At times I've emailed myself a message reminder.
- My brother relies on his secretaries to remind him of the priorities of the day.
- Some people are sticky-note fanatics – putting sticky-notes all over the place – even on the steering wheel of their car.
- Some are old fashioned. They write down a list and put it in their pocket... and then tie a string around their finger to remind them which pocket they put the note in... and then write down on a sticky-note why it is they have a string tied to their finger...

What was I talking about? Oh. Right. We are so forgetful. And this problem of being forgetful is not something new. It's as old as the Bible itself. Which is precisely what Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is all about.

Moses is reminding the people that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing! He does this by giving them a great commandment – known as the “Shema”. The Shema, one of only two prayers specifically commanded in the Torah, consists of three biblical passages and is recorded here in Deuteronomy 6:4 is one of the mountain peak moments in all of Scripture.

(Sh'ma Yisra'eil Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad.)

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

And here's why Moses is giving the people the Shema - this great commandment - at this time. Moses has led the people out of Egyptian slavery. They have been a nomadic tribe traveling in the wilderness for a long time and now two very dramatic things are about to happen to them.

First, they're about to cross over into the Promised Land. Second, Moses can't go with them. Moses disobeyed God when he struck a rock to produce water rather than to obey God and speak to the rock. Moses will not be with them to remind them that they are God's covenant people and that they put their trust in Him and Him Alone.

So, to help them to remember...he “ties a string around their finger” (so to speak) by giving them the Shema to remind them to put God first, to serve God alone, and to put their faith and trust in God. “No other Gods. Love God alone with all you heart, soul and might.”

Put these words on the doorposts of your homes. Put these words on the gates of your city. Wear them on your arm-bands and head-bands. Speak them in every worship service. Teach them to your children. Don't give in to the temptation to worship the gods of the Canaanites. Don't water down or contaminate your faith. Don't chase after every new fad that comes along. Put your trust in Yahweh. Serve Him... and Him alone.

For all those years, the Hebrew people had struggled to survive in the wilderness. Now, they've come to the Promised Land. They had dreamed of this. They had longed for this. They had prayed for this.

But Moses knew that now, as they went into the land, they would face an even more dangerous problem... and that was the fact that other people already lived there... and they had their own set of gods they worshipped. They had a god of wine, a god of war, a god of fertility, a god of this, a god for that and a god for the other.

Moses knew that as they settled in, some of these gods would look attractive to the Hebrews... so much so that they might begin to worship them. So Moses gave them the Shema to be a constant and daily reminder... to worship, serve and trust God alone, to love God (and no other) with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

The Shema is as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago when Moses first spoke it...because it's all about choices, decisions, commitments, loyalties, priorities. It's about deciding – to whom will we give our allegiance and in whom will we put our trust.

Let's bring this closer to home with three thoughts. First of all, **when you face an uncertain future, Remember God.**

As the Hebrew people marched into this new adventure in the Promised Land with all of its challenges and uncertainties and new opportunities... Moses gave them this commandment to remind them

- To put God first;
- To worship Him alone;
- To not be taken in by false prophets or gimmicky religion;
- To remember God's promise that He would always be with them.

Remember that scene in the *Sound of Music* where Captain Von Trapp and Maria return from their honeymoon to discover that the Nazis have taken over Austria and are forcing Captain Von Trapp to join their military?

The Von Trapps decide to escape over the mountains... but then realize that all the roadways are blocked at the border. So they abandon their car... and walk over the mountains. But Maria is worried about the seven children making such a long, difficult and dangerous journey. That's when Captain Von Trapp says: "They can make it. We will take turns carrying the little ones. We know the mountains so well. We can make it. And remember, God will help us, God will go with us."

That's God's greatest promise, isn't it? We find it recorded over and over again in the Bible... on page after page of the Scriptures...God's promise to always be with us, to never forsake us, to give us the strength we need in every situation.

Someone said that God always gives us the strength we need, but it's never given before it's needed lest we take the credit.

So, if you are going off to college, or to a new school, or a new job, or a new marriage, or a new home, or a new location, or a new challenge, or a new opportunity, or a new health situation... remember God His love, His strength, His great promise to always be with us.

SECOND, when you're tempted to short-cut your best self... Remember God.

An anonymous writer penned, "When I was 12 years old growing up in Memphis, Tennessee, I played one summer on a pretty good Junior League Baseball Team. That's what we called it before Little League was created.

Our team made it all the way to the City Championship Game. In the last inning, we had a two-run lead with two outs, but the other team had the bases loaded. We only needed one more out to be city champs. The batter hit a routine ground ball to our third baseman who fielded it cleanly and threw to first base. As our first baseman caught the ball the webbing in his glove broke, the ball went through... and before he could run and retrieve the ball, three runs had scored. The game was over and we lost the city championship by one run!

In that game, I had been cleated by a runner sliding into second base. I stayed in the game, but I had a pretty deep cut on my leg. We were playing at the Memphis Fair Grounds and a doctor was on hand who insisted that I go into the First Aid Tent and have my leg looked at.

The coach insisted I go, too, promising he would get somebody to drive me home. As I came out of the First Aid tent, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was Mr. Tony. What was the coach thinking?

Mr. Tony was the town grouch! He was mean and tough with a sour look and evil eyes. All the kids... and most of the adults in Memphis... were scared to death of Mr. Tony. With fear and trembling I got into his truck and with a frightened, squeaky voice I said: "Thanks for waiting for me, Mr. Tony."

He grunted and scowled. For twenty minutes we rode along in silence. When we reached my house I said: "Thanks for the ride, Mr. Tony." Mr. Tony looked at me with angry eyes and he said: "So's that all you've got to say? Thanks? How much gas do you think that's gonna buy?"

I was hurt, stunned, embarrassed. I got out of the truck and ran to my house. It was one of those awful, painful moments in life... that you think you'll never get over or forget. I dreaded seeing Mr. Tony after that... and I avoided him as much as I could... but when I did see him, the pain, the hurt, the embarrassment would flood back into my mind.

Years later, I was coming home from college for the weekend. When I got into Memphis, it was just getting dark, but I could make out some hitch-hiker holding up a sign that said "Hollywood." That's the part of Memphis I lived in.

I stopped... and can you believe it? The hitch-hiker was Mr. Tony! We rode along in silence. We came to my house and I kept on driving down the road 10 blocks or so until I pulled up in front of Mr. Tony's house. As Mr. Tony got out of the car, he turned back and said, "Thanks for the ride, Jim."

Now, you know what I wanted to say, don't you? Most every fiber of my being wanted to say it: "Thanks? Thanks? How much gas do you think that's gonna buy?"

That's what I wanted to say. That's what I almost said. But as my lips were narrowing and starting to form the words I wanted to say, right then I remembered something... I remembered God. I remembered Jesus and what He taught. I remembered my Christian Faith. And empowered by God's Holy Spirit I said: "You're more than welcome, Mr. Tony! You can ride with me anytime! I'm always glad to help a friend!"

Moses knew the Hebrew people would face great temptations in their new land. He knew they would be tempted to do things not worthy of their sacred heritage. He knew they would be tempted to short-cut their best selves... and contaminate their covenant faith.

So he gave them this great commandment to love God alone with all your heart, soul and might. They would be sure to always remember God.

Third, **when you have to face death, then too, and especially then, Remember God.** Isn't it something to realize that Moses never made it to the Promised Land? He died just before they got there. He led the people out of Egyptian bondage. He led them through the Red Sea. He led them through the wilderness. He taught them how to be God's people.

Then, when they came to a mountain where they could see the land... Moses knew that he would not enter the promised land because of his disobedience, so he passed the torch to Joshua and let Joshua lead the people into the land... while Moses stayed behind... on the mountain alone to die.

Can you imagine how that must have felt for him to be so near yet so far? To be so close to the land he had dreamed of entering and yet too old and sick and tired to go on?

At that moment, Moses remembered God. Which is the good news of our faith. When we have to face an uncertain future, when we have to do battle with temptation and yes, even when we have to face our death or the death of a loved one... we can remember God and His Great Promise to always be with us... and we can remember to love God with all our heart, soul and might.