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“Realize and Remember”

Sermon Series: *Mission Possible*, No. 1

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Deuteronomy 6:1-12

1 These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. 3 Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

10 When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, 11 houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, 12 be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

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We'll get to Deuteronomy 6 in a few minutes, but you could turn there now to avoid the rush if you like. The first twelve verses of Deuteronomy chapter 6.

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The word, “mission” has come up quite a lot around here recently. The last two weeks we focused on **world missions**...God's call for His Church to join Him in inviting all peoples...all nations...to Himself.

That's always been God's mission. Originally, He shared it with Israel...He asked the Hebrews to live before the nations of the world in such a way that would reveal Him as the one true God.

And of course that's now God's mission for all who know **Jesus**, His son. We're to invite those around us into relationship with God by becoming disciples of Jesus.

We talked about that a few weeks ago...our work...our mission, as Jesus put it in Matthew 28, is to "...make **disciples** (make doers of Jesus' words) of all nations, baptizing them (inviting them to lives of faith) and then teaching them to obey everything God says."

Our mission...the Church's mission...the work of current disciples is to join God in making more disciples.

Is that possible? Are disciples being made in our day?

Well, it must be possible. If it were not possible, God would not ask us to do it.

To ask the impossible is something only a tyrant would do, and God is no tyrant.

So disciple-making is definitely "mission possible."

But how is it done? How are disciples made, and what is our part in it?

This is where theory becomes reality, right?

This is what you call practical theology.

How do you and I fulfill the mission of making disciples?

The Church has explored that question countless times through the ages...and there really is no quick, simple answer. In fact, the process of making a disciple of Jesus is about as unique as the making of a person himself or herself.

By God's design, we are all so different that there could never be just one, simple prescription for disciple-making, which is why, even though many have tried to write the definitive book or program or curriculum – and many are very good – none are really all-encompassing.

We are too complex of creatures to fit neatly into simple slots.

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Just the same, there are principles of discipleship that cut across the human spectrum, and when they're applied to persons in appropriate measure, making disciples is very much possible.

This Deuteronomy passage gives us at least **one** disciple-making principle; I'm calling it "realize and remember," and all it means is to **learn**...to **realize** the **values** and **character** of God, and then...**remember** them...keep them ever before us in thought and life.

Realizing and remembering is a principle of discipleship.

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Now, to **realize**, of course, involves an educational component. We have to learn what is and what is not the character of God. We have to learn the values and principles that are important to Him.

That was part of the idea of the Old Testament Law. In order to realize who their God was, the people of Israel had to learn about Him; they had to get to know Him.

Who is this God who's leading us through the desert...

Is He for telling the truth or for lying?

Does He value life or not?

Is He the only God, or just one of many?

Is He consistent or does He change?

Is He out for the good of His creation or is He out to take advantage of it?

What is good to Him?

What is important to Him?

What is valuable to Him?

The answers to all those sorts of questions came with the Law that God gave to Moses. That was God's way of revealing Himself to His people, so they could **realize** who He was.

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And then came the **remember** part, which is probably the bigger challenge of the two.

I was reading this the other day...from St. Joe hospital...this article in here about memory. It says that every year past our 65th birthday, we lose 7 cubic centimeters of brain tissue that usually affects the memory.

We have problems remembering, and the fall is responsible for that and the limitations that come with it. We can't even remember things like we were created to do.

And we all know this, so we've created mechanisms to remind us about things. The calendars we keep, the alarms we set, our clocks, our schedules, some of us have secretaries or assistants – even our spouses and kids...they all help us remember important things.

Well, God understands our need for help to remember even what we've learned about Him, which is why He says, there in verses 6 through 9:

6 "These commandments that I give you today ... 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

God's saying, "Make sure you talk about what I've revealed to you...with your kids...with your family...with each other...with other God-followers." He says, "Talk about it wherever you are, both at home and when you travel. Talk about these things morning and night...whenever you can."

He wants us to take every opportunity to realize the character of God that we see in persons, in situations; in creation and in beauty and in truth and in virtue. Make the connection that this is of God...this is Godly...and then verbalize it...affirm it...mark God's character and principles across our lives. Wherever and however we can, God wants us to keep godliness before our consciousness.

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God says we need to do this...because, of course, the fallen world around us takes every opportunity to exalt **godlessness** and push it into our lives.

Thanks to the fall, none of us have to work hard to see brokenness and falsehood and corruption do we? Especially in an election year.

We don't have to work at all to see *godlessness* in our world. We couldn't avoid it if we *tried*.

But we *do* have to work to realize and remember who God is; and if we'll do that, then godliness will be, Moses says there in verse 6, "*impressed upon our hearts.*"

If we'll participate in this "active remembering" that God's speaking of here, who God is and what He values will actually become a part of us; and that's what God is after...that's actually the real core of discipleship: God's character and God's values driven deep within persons.

That is us...human beings...becoming who God made us originally to be.

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We are already created in God's image.

The fall distorted that image, but the goal of discipleship is it's restoration. God's image re-created in us in all it's glory so humanity could be fully human again.

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That could only happen to a limited degree in Moses' day. Israel lacked the power to see it happen thoroughly.

But because of God's Spirit in our world, it is completely possible today.

The inner transformation...re-creation of persons is why God sent His Spirit to earth. He's here to empower disciples...Christ-followers to actually embody God's character and values...to become like Jesus from the inside out...so we can truly fulfill the great commandment (that's given here in verse 5 and that Jesus later repeats) of loving God with all our heart, soul and strength.

God's Spirit enlivens and empowers our realizing and remembering such that we can love God...we can love *what* He loves...and we can love *like* He loves.

The Spirit provides the power that makes our realizing and remembering effective. But the Spirit doesn't take the place of the work of realizing and remembering. Those are still things we need to do if we want to be disciples, ourselves, and if we want to participate in God's disciple-making mission.

That's why we take all the opportunities we can to learn of God...classes, Bible reading and studies, books, personal devotions, listening to other believers' wisdom and experiences...letting as much Christian influence into our lives as possible.

That's why the church here offers all that we do...times of learning and listening and serving. That's why we encourage and try to resource personal devotions and study. It takes time and effort to *learn*...to *realize* who God is and what He's like.

And that's true all our lives long. There's always more to God to discover. There are always new realities about God that lie ahead.

No matter how long we've followed Him, there are always new things about God to realize.

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And then, the remembering part. That's the importance of worship and community and connection and Christian *fellowship*...which, in some ways, is just a churchy word for hanging out with other Christ-followers.

But...fellowship is not a mindless sort of hanging out.

Fellowship is hanging out with a purpose...the purpose of intentionally remembering...calling to mind all the things of God.

Fellowship is disciples connecting to help one another remember what we've realized about God. It's the rehearsing *together* of God's character and values, so those truths might settle deep into our hearts.

It's why the church gathers multiple times a week. It's why all these different groups are offered and why we encourage mentoring and why we do retreats and camps and group outings and why we advertise all the great opportunities we have around us, especially here in Wilmore, for Christian fellowship.

Fellowship, if done well, is a major driver of *remembering*...which is a huge part of discipleship.

"Take every opportunity to learn of God and to rehearse, together, what you've learned." That's what Moses is saying here.

That's s principle of making a disciple.

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That's certainly true as I think of discipleship in my life.

Growing up, we were in church at just about every opportunity. There weren't many of them, but my parents took advantage of all the kid and teen programs our church had. I don't imagine they really even thought about it as discipleship at the time – going to church is just what we did. But I see now that all those learning and connecting experiences were formational to me.

So much of my early realization of God and His character and His word and what was important to Him came from mostly old women Sunday school and Wednesday night teachers who, rather than a life of ease, chose to give their time investing in this pretty unruly kid. Though many of them could likely not have articulated it, I was a living example to them of the doctrine of original sin.

Also, our family almost always had breakfast and supper together...that was just what you did, and though I don't think my parents were so much intentional about it, the things we talked about around the table would often come back to something of God...what was good, what was not, what was right and what was wrong.

Just praying for the meals set the tone that God was present there...part of realizing who God is.

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The fellowship component, for me growing up, happened really with extended family. My dad's family was large and close and all part of the same church, so family gatherings were church

gatherings and church gatherings family gatherings, and so not only was I surrounded by good influences, church and family-wise, I was also surrounded by people who would not hesitate to tell on me if I did something wrong.

Let me say, though I didn't always appreciate it then, that sort of pressure is a very good thing; it kept me from doing lots of stupid stuff. It seemed like there were eyes on me everywhere I went...eyes that my parents appreciated.

Unlike lots of parents today, who think they're kids are perfect, my parents knew I was not, and they appreciated lots of deputies keeping watch over me.

And in all the craziness and immorality that was part of my high school, it was my cousins and family and their threat of exposure that kept me moored.

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You know, if a kid has just one, true Christian friend...if there's just one person in a kid's life who is not afraid to say, "Don't do that dumb thing!" If every young man or woman could have just one friend like that to walk through seasons of life with, they can make it through anything.

Having and being that sort of friend is part of discipleship.

Though I grew up in church, I didn't really have a personal relationship with Jesus until college. I was 19 years old when I truly met Jesus.

But you know, once I received Jesus, then all that learning about God that I did as a kid came into focus. It was like something was turned on that put all that random knowledge and belief about God into order.

That's what actually knowing Jesus can do.

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It's been 36 years since then, and the Lord has used a whole variety of things in different seasons, for different lengths of time, in my own discipleship.

People, couples, families, groups, studies, books, classes, life experiences – both good and bad, friends, strangers, Annette and our boys...God's used all these to disciple me in different ways.

That's the thing about individuals; in His grace, God adapts His methods to fit us.

Some people want to say, "Well discipleship has to look just this way."

I would say, "That's just not so."

If we're willing to be *learners* and *recollectors*; if we'll put ourselves in positions where we can *realize* and *remember*; there is no end to the means and methods God will use to grow us up in Him.

His Spirit is not in any way limited by a certain book or schedule or methodology.

At times, God has used a stranger's comment to teach me more about Him than a semester-long seminary class. Then again, He uses classes and studies to fill in the blanks in rich and important ways.

Really, it's the willingness and availability of the heart that He's looking for, because though He does work through persons and programs, really, God's Holy Spirit is the capital "D" Disciplemaker who's working in and through...and sometimes in spite of...all the small "d" disciplemakers in His Church.

I know that, and I'm counting on that, especially with my kids.

If you have kids, they are your first and most important mission field. Annette and I have tried to be intentional about providing our kids opportunities for both realizing God's character and values, and also remembering – reinforcing those truths so that they would sink deep into our boys' souls. We've not done it perfectly, but we've done our best.

Whether or not I'm the pastor, we would have had our kids right here in this place at every opportunity because they need every encounter with godliness they can get.

And...we made consistently connecting and conversing with our boys...whenever we can, but especially over meals...a priority. We have tried to intentionally see God's hand and truth in our lives and remember Him with them...and through the years, many of you have joined us in that, and we're grateful.

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But you know, as much as Annette and I have done and have not done, we know God is far more interested in our kids' discipleship than even we are, and He's working in ways we haven't and in many ways we can't.

I know that, as long as their hearts are open and willing, just as He did with me, God's Spirit will disciple them through their relationships, through their own studies, through the classes they're taking in this particular season of their lives, and directly – through His still, small voice.

God empowers our efforts, and then He keeps on working ... shaping ...molding... correcting ... encouraging even when we can't. He works through people and circumstances, and He also works directly...through His Spirit...to help all who are truly open and seeking to become and to make disciples of Jesus.

He's the greater partner in all this...and we can count on Him. Discipleship is ours to work at, in ourselves and in those we're charged to disciple, but we can also trust that God is doing the greater part.

So let me ask...do you faithfully put yourself in positions where you can realize who God really is?

Are there mechanisms set up in your life to help you remember?

Is there some new step that God is asking you to take in your own discipleship or in your efforts to disciple someone else?

Don't be afraid to take it. You can trust that it's for good.

God wants us all to be disciples and disciple makers, and He'll show us how if we'll walk willingly with Him.

**Closing Prayer**

**Closing Song:** “O, to Be Like Thee”

**Closing Words & Benediction:**

May we all give the Lord the freedom to have His way with us...with our time, with our energies, with our priorities, so as we work to realize and remember who He is, His Spirit will indeed stamp His image deep in our hearts, and through us on the hearts of the disciples He calls us to make around us. He is at work; He wants to work through us all in just this way.

Thanks for coming to worship today. The Lord bless and keep you. Amen.

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