

# What God Requires

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**Sermon Series:**  
**Deuteronomy**

**Deuteronomy 10:12-22**

***Christians ignore the Old Testament.***

**T***empus fugit* is a Latin phrase meaning time flees or, alternately, time flies.

The phrase is attributed to the Roman poet Virgil. You will sometimes see *tempus fugit* inscribed on grandfather clocks and wristwatches.

Time flies, doesn't it? Can you believe Labor Day is a week from tomorrow? Labor Day is one of those demarcation days in the calendar, signaling the end of summer and the advent of fall, where we begin in earnest, once again, our routine of work and school.

This summer, we've been preaching our way through the book of Deuteronomy. Earlier this summer, we examined each of the Ten Commandments. Presently, we are highlighting pivotal passages from the book of Deuteronomy.

Why Deuteronomy? Why bother with this obscure Old Testament book?

For nearly half of the year, from Christmas to Easter, the Christian church focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ from the New Testament. In order to give equal weight to the other half of the Bible, our church devotes the summer months to the Old Testament. Last summer we preached—can anyone remember—from the Old Testament book of Exodus. The year before that,

suspecting no one remembers back that far, our sermons were drawn from the Old Testament prophecies of Jeremiah.

Christians ignore the Old Testament. We are, after all, New Testament people. But I have found the New Testament comes alive as I discover the vitality of the Old Testament.

There is a myth that is perpetuated in church circles that the God portrayed in the Old Testament is harsh and punitive while the God represented in the New Testament is benevolent and kind. Nonsense! Some of the most loving, gracious attributes of God are disclosed within the pages of the Old Testament.

Our purpose in preaching from the Old Testament is to acquaint you with these 39 books and inspire you to read them. We want you to fall in love with the Old Testament.

Where do I start in reading the Old Testament, you ask? Since our Bibles have been open to Deuteronomy, why not start there?

Let me remind you why we encourage people to read the Bible in the first place. The Bible expresses all that God wants us to know about living a Christian life. You may have noticed in our Scripture lesson that these commandments are given for our well-being. These commands are not complicated or obscure; quite the contrary, they are simple and direct. They

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are given for our welfare. The Bible is eminently livable!

I'll admit the Bible is not an easy book to read. It takes persistence and dedication, but so does most everything else we do. This book grows on you!

We do not read the Bible so much for information as for formation. God forms and shapes us through His Word. This book does not curry our favor or flatter us; it carefully diagnoses our spiritual condition and offers a real time remedy. God, through the Holy Spirit, uses Scripture to form Christ in us.

The title for this book, Deuteronomy, originates from a Latin word meaning second law. Deuteronomy constitutes the second law God gives to his people. The first law was given 40 years earlier on Mount Sinai. After a 40-year sojourn in the wilderness, God's people arrive at the doorstep to the Promised Land. A whole new generation has grown up since the original law was given in Exodus. Moses, now an old man, issues his farewell address, which reiterates and elaborates on the original law given in Exodus. Moses' sermon spans 30 chapters in Deuteronomy. Folks, that's a long sermon! A 20-minute sermon ought to be a walk in the park for you! Incidentally, the longest sermon, according to the Guinness Book of World Records is an astonishing 93 hours!

Moses asks in our Scripture lesson, "What does the Lord require of you?" (10:12). He answers in summary fashion,

"Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today for your own well being" (10:12-13).

I direct your attention to the five verbs in our lesson—fear, walk, love, serve and keep. When the Bible uses the word "fear" in relationship to God, it doesn't mean a cowering sense of terror. Fear is analogous to the words awe and reverence. In our casual, breezy approach to today's religion, where God is simply our buddy, we could use a renewed sense of awe and reverence.

The phrase "walk in all his ways" is a common Old Testament expression with a strong ethical component. When it comes to Biblical ethics, God wants us to walk the talk!

The verbs "love" and "serve" are not sappy, sentimental emotions. They issue forth in practical acts of service, as expressed in verses 17-19. The Biblical God is a zealous advocate of most vulnerable members of society. In the Old Testament, this category includes widows, orphans and strangers.

The last verb, "keep," expresses what it means to live in total obedience to God. These commands are meant to be obeyed and not merely recited.

These five verbs express in a comprehensive way what God requires of us. We revere God. We walk in all His ways. We love and

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serve the Lord with all our hearts and souls. We endeavor to keep His commands.

I want to take a step back and place this passage from Deuteronomy into a larger Old Testament context. The Old Testament unambiguously declares from one end to the other that God is on a mission. Ever since sin entered into the human condition, God's mission has been to reconcile people back to Himself. God will stop at nothing to accomplish His mission. God blesses, calls, cleanses, destroys, frees, forgives, guides, heals, judges, leads, loves, nurtures, promises, provides, shapes, warns and woos. God does it all for love.

God called the Jewish people to accomplish His mission. The Jews were not chosen because they were more righteous than other people. We read in chapter 9, "The Lord your God is not giving you this good land [destiny] to occupy because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people" (9:6).

The metaphor the Old Testament employs to depict this stubbornness is the phrase "stiff necked" (Exodus 33:3, 5). Ordinarily, this phrase is used for oxen unwilling to submit to the yoke. I have never tried to corral oxen in a yoke, but I have encountered horses which refuse to be led by a bridle. The pasture that borders our house is home to four horses. Occasionally, I will try to influence them in a certain direction by taking hold of their halters. If these horses don't cooperate, they

will stiffen their necks, rendering me powerless to direct them.

God called the Jewish people to join Him on His mission. God chose them for responsibility rather than privilege. But God's people see their chosen status as special favor and wall themselves off from the world. God raises up prophets to bring Israel back on task—to no avail.

So the New Testament tells us, God enters our world in Jesus Christ to reconcile people back to God. Jesus commissions his followers, called disciples, to take up God's reconciling mission. "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21).

The primary purpose of the church, which constitutes Jesus' followers, is to take up God's mission in the world. We are not merely asking God to join us on our mission. We join what God is already doing in this world. We must discern where God is already working and join Him in His work.

We cannot reduce this mission to a program or a committee; mission is the church's very identity. The reason we gather here each Sunday is to equip God's people to accomplish God's mission in the world.

The church is not an institutional end in itself; it's a gift God gives to the world so that all may believe.

We do not go to church; we are the church. We're on a mission with God.

Our mission is not merely to people already here; our mission is

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to people who are not yet here. The places where we live and work are our primary mission field.

*Field of Dreams* was an Oscar nominee for best picture back in 1990. It was a movie about an Iowa corn farmer, Ray Kinsella, who hears a mysterious voice telling him to construct a baseball diamond in the middle of his cornfield. Ray hears a voice whisper, "If you build it, he [meaning Ray's father] will come." So at considerable financial expense and the ridicule of neighbors, Ray builds this field of dreams. When he does, Shoeless Joe Jackson and seven members of the Chicago Black Sox team banned from the game for throwing the 1919 World Series suddenly emerge from the cornfield. Only those who believe can behold the return of these ghostly players.

The pivotal line in the movie is the refrain, "If you build it, he will come." It used to be true, when the church was at the center of culture, that if we built it, they would come. But in this post-modern, post-Christian world, the church is no longer at the heart of cultural life. If we build it, they will not necessarily come.

My neighbors, who don't attend church, have been asking, with keen interest, about our construction project. They are genuinely curious. Yet, I don't suspect they will come just because we have built a new mission center and expanded our sanctuary. If they won't come, then we had better go. God didn't say, Ya'll come. God said go!

Jesus said, "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). Literally, the verse translates, "As you are going, make disciples."

Some of you are not yet on God's mission. You have not as yet appropriated into your life God's means of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. If so, I invite you to pray along with me at the end of this sermon a few moments from now.

Some of you are in the process of joining God in this mission. Where do we need to take the next step in joining God in His mission?

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