

PRESSING ON IN FAITH

STUDY ONE

Looking Back, Let's Remember the Journey

Deuteronomy 8:1–5

Remember how the Lord your God led you through this year. He never once abandoned you, never once left you on your own, never once refused to hear your prayers, never once mistreated or abused you in any way. He was there with you through it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

Do you remember when . . . ?” These familiar words draw out a range of emotions—from warm nostalgia to deep grief. Regardless of what someone pauses to remember, reflections on the past shed light on the present, often revealing attitudes to embrace or mistakes to avoid.

For this reason, remembrance is a distinctively Christian practice whose origin dates to the earliest days of the people of Israel. As the redeemed look back, they can see all the ways their providential Lord has brought them to where they are today and made them who they are today.

When did you last take time to reflect on all that God has done for you and how He has guided each and every one of your steps? This *Searching the Scriptures* study will look to Israel’s example to help you practice the spiritual act of remembering so that you might discern God’s leading hand in your life, even as you endure the wilderness of your most difficult days.



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Looking Back, Let's Remember the Journey

Deuteronomy 8:1–5



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The practices of remembrance and thanksgiving weave together to strengthen the cord of one's faith. Offer this prayer of thanks to God as you prepare to open His Word today:

Father, as I look back on my life this past year, I know I have endured great challenges. Thank You for helping me endure them. Through my study of Your Word, enable me to see how You are working in my life, especially through the hardships. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

After God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, they spent forty years wandering in the wilderness like nomads, nursing aching muscles, sweating under the heat of the sun, and shivering through long nights.

During this four-decade experience, each Israelite wondered, “Does God really care about us? Why did He free us from slavery just to let us die in the wilderness?” (See [Exodus 16:2–3](#)).

Isn't it easy to forget how God meets the needs of His people during trials?

Despite the difficulties, God preserved and protected the Israelites in miraculous ways. He parted the Red Sea, allowing them to escape the Egyptian army. They drank water that gushed from a rock, and they ate bread that fell from the sky like snow. He guided them by pillars of cloud and fire. No one would say their lives were luxurious—or even comfortable—but they were *alive*!

At the end of those forty long years, a new generation of Israelites prepared to enter the land God had promised. Before they crossed the border of the wilderness into the land flowing with milk and honey, their leader Moses offered some final words of advice. Not even Moses knew what would await them in this new land, but he did know one essential truth . . .

God will always lead you through the wilderness.



Looking Back, Let's Remember the Journey

Deuteronomy 8:1–5



Observation: The Israelites' Remembrance

By the time God led Israel to the end of the wilderness, Moses was close to death. The book of Deuteronomy records his final address to the people. Central to his exhortation is a single command: *remember*. Read [Deuteronomy 8:1–5](#), and observe Moses' explanation of this simple yet profound imperative.¹

According to [8:2](#), what specifically did Moses want the Israelites to remember?

Moses pointed out two things God accomplished while the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. He *humbled* them, and He *tested* them. According to [8:2](#), why did God test His people by making them endure this difficult season?

According to [8:3](#), how did God humble the Israelites? Why did He humble them?



Looking Back, Let's Remember the Journey

Deuteronomy 8:1–5

What evidence did Moses offer in *Deuteronomy 8:4* to show that God had not abandoned His people?

What analogy did Moses use in *8:5* to explain God's actions over the past forty years?

God doesn't operate as though He's unreasonable. He just doesn't do it our way. Because it takes a heavenly appetite to enjoy a heavenly food, He sometimes lets His own children go hungry. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Remembrance

Moses concluded his exhortation by appealing to Israel's discipline under their loving Father. But why did they deserve the extreme punishment of wandering in the wilderness for so long?



Looking Back, Let's Remember the Journey

Deuteronomy 8:1–5

Four decades earlier, as the Israelites stood at the edge of the promised land, spies reported that the land teemed with ferocious giants. The people were afraid, and they wanted to abandon the plan to enter the land. According to [Numbers 14:20–25](#), why did God discipline His children for this behavior? How is this example instructive for followers of Jesus today?

The Hebrew word translated “remember” depicts more than fond reminiscence. Rather, the Old Testament authors used this term to describe God’s covenantal relationship with His chosen people Israel. Often, Israel was called to remember God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises, and an essential part of this remembrance was their response of faithful obedience.

How does this explanation of the word help you understand why remembrance is so important to God?

Remember, it was the Lord who led you all the way through the wilderness. God is faithful and will meet your needs regardless of how difficult things may be, how exposed you may be, how vulnerable you may be to danger. God faithfully remains your protector, your shield, your guide. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Looking Back, Let's Remember the Journey

Deuteronomy 8:1–5



Correlation: The Ephesians' Remembrance

The apostle Paul was a faithful Jew before witnessing the resurrected Christ, so he knew the importance of remembrance for the people of God. In [Ephesians 2:11–13](#), he called his Gentile readers to engage in remembrance in order to understand the life-changing power of the gospel.

In [2:12](#), Paul clarified his command by telling his Gentile readers *what* to remember. What five aspects of their former identity did he list?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

While Paul seemed to focus on the bad news for these Gentiles, the message of Jesus Christ is *good* news. So Paul begins [2:13](#) with two powerful words: “But now . . .” What contrast did Paul make between the Gentiles’ former state and their present reality in Jesus Christ?

Just as Israelites living in the paradise of Canaan looked back at the season of wandering in the wilderness, so also are believers living in the light of Jesus’ sacrifice called to remember their time lost in the darkness of sin. In doing so, Christians today—like the ancient Israelites—can experience Jesus’ provision, faithfulness, and mercy.



Looking Back, Let's Remember the Journey

Deuteronomy 8:1–5



Application: Our Remembrance

Today, you may feel like an Israelite wandering in the wilderness—a financial, relational, or medical wilderness. Yet God uses these experiences to help His children grow. Specifically, God uses our seasons of wilderness wandering to . . .

1. *Humble us—so that we may have a clearer vision and appreciation of His power and glory.*
2. *Test our character—so that its impurities may be revealed and burned away.*
3. *Let us grow hungry—so that we may learn to depend upon His provision in all things.*
4. *Teach us new ways we need to adopt—so that we may better shine His light in the world.*

Did you go through a wilderness experience recently—one when you seemed to have no control over your circumstances? How did God bring you through to a land of milk and honey on the other side?

How can you actively respond to your remembrance of God's faithfulness to you?



Looking Back, Let's Remember the Journey

Deuteronomy 8:1–5

You may feel like you're lost in the wilderness right now, and that's okay! Remember, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Just as God led them into the promised land, He will welcome you into eternal bliss because of your faith in Jesus Christ. Find hope today as you remember that God is faithful and keeps His promises.



A FINAL PRAYER

Offer your own prayer of remembrance and thanksgiving to God as you conclude your study today.

Father,

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



PRESSING ON IN FAITH

STUDY TWO

Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

Hebrews 12:1–3

We don't know what this year holds for us. Whatever it may be, we can be sure of this: He knows the way we take. He has planned for us what pleases Him, and we adapt to it, adjust to it, accept it, and conduct our lives confident that He will lead us and strengthen us through it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERY four years, the world's best athletes gather to compete in the Olympic games. The competitors represent some of the most talented individuals in the world. But raw talent isn't enough to earn one of the few coveted spots on the athletic world stage.

ON YOUR MARK . . .

Yes, all Olympian runners—for example—have talent, but they match their talent with hard work. Their innate ability shone brightly the first time their feet touched the track. So for the following years, they dedicated themselves each day to an intense training regimen that amplified their abilities to prepare them for this singular moment on the starting line.

GET SET . . .

As they stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the fastest runners in the world, one question will race through their minds: *Am I ready?*



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Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

Hebrews 12:1-3

This same question ought to run through the minds of followers of Jesus as well. This *Searching the Scriptures* study will show how God has laid the specific course of a race only you can complete. Are you prepared to run it faithfully?

GO!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

No one will achieve a vibrant Christian life through sheer grit, hard work, and determination. Instead, the path of the follower of Jesus beholds His grace at every turn, where He reveals His greatness through your weakness. Offer this prayer to God as you prepare to study His Word.

Father, I confess that the only thing I have earned in my life is eternal condemnation. Yet I praise You for Your grace. Thank You for offering me the eternal prizes of the forgiveness of sins and new life. Help me as I seek to run a race that is honoring to You. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The earliest Christians were Jews who found hope in Jesus as the One who fulfilled all the Old Testament's messianic promises. They left behind their old path characterized by law and works and chose to run a new race—one marked by grace and forgiveness and faith in Christ.

Yet this new race of faith proved to be more challenging than the other one. Obstacles like internal pride and external persecution caused many to want to abandon the way of Jesus for the old mode of living.

The author of Hebrews wrote a letter to his own people to urge them to continue to pursue Jesus faithfully, despite all the difficulties, in order to obtain the eternal reward found only in Him.



Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

Hebrews 12:1–3



Observation: The Race

Read [Hebrews 12:1–3](#) a few times, and use a different Bible translation each time. As you read, keep track of your observations below. Focus simply on what the text says.¹

According to [12:1](#), who has set out the race of the Christian life?

According to [12:1–2](#), how are followers of Jesus Christ commanded to run this race? What kinds of obstacles tend to slow them down and trip them up?



Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

Hebrews 12:1–3

According to *Hebrews 12:2–3*, where can believers find encouragement when they want to give up because of the race's difficulty?

How good it is when we can simply say, “Lord, this is obviously Your will for me. I wouldn’t have chosen it, but I accept it. And I ask for strength to run this race.”

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Course

The race imagery causes many to misunderstand how God envisions life for His people. Many hear the word *race* and think only of a competition. Either you win the race, or you lose it.

Yet anyone who puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ receives the prizes of forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Therefore, the author of *Hebrews* was more interested in staying on the course and less concerned about who gets first, second, or third place. How does this interpretation help you understand the importance of the Christian community as you run the race of faith?

The Greek word translated “race” in *Hebrews 12:1* is *agon*, which refers broadly to a kind of struggle, but more specifically it refers to a competition or—in this instance—a race. The English word *agony* is derived from this context.



Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

Hebrews 12:1–3

This is not to say that Christians will experience or should strive for a life of pure agony. In fact, God loves to lavish His children with blessings! It does, however, mean that life will often be characterized by struggle. How does *Hebrews 12:1–3* demonstrate how a follower of Jesus Christ should respond when he or she encounters obstacles in life?

I want you to finish well. Don't just run until it gets tough. It'll get really tough, and you'll want to quit. You'll want to go back to a habit that can ruin your life. Or you'll want to return to a lifestyle that you'll be ashamed of. Don't quit, don't stop. Stay in the race regardless. That's what the Lord wants for every one of us. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Apostle Paul's Race

The New Testament contains a story of one believer's hard-fought race. The apostle Paul had ample opportunity to give up, but he didn't because he was well-prepared and because he kept his eyes on Jesus.

According to *2 Corinthians 11:24–27*, what kinds of struggles did Paul face on his race? List three or four trials that stand out to you. If you had faced these same circumstances, at what point would you have most wanted to give up?



PRESSING ON IN FAITH

STUDY TWO

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

Hebrews 12:1–3

Yet Paul had one more trial to endure—his own execution. As he approached the finish line, he penned a heartfelt letter to Timothy. Read [2 Timothy 4:5](#). What advice did Paul want his protégé to keep in mind as he faced obstacles in his own race?

According to [4:7–8](#), why was Paul able to stay focused on the prize of Jesus throughout his race? What hope did he have in Jesus?

What a powerful example of a well-run race! Followers of Jesus can look to Paul's example as they run their own races today.



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Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

Hebrews 12:1–3



Application: Running Your Own Race

Based on his study of *Hebrews 12:1–3*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll developed five application points regarding the Christian race:

1. *God has predetermined each person's race.*
2. *Preparing for your race is your responsibility.*
3. *Stay focused on Jesus throughout the race.*
4. *When discouraged, think of all He endured.*
5. *No matter how difficult life may become, never quit running the race.*

Even the team that loses the first few games of the season can turn things around and go on to win the championship. You may find yourself at a point where it feels like finishing your race well is impossible, but it's never too late to start pursuing God.

What practical steps can you take today to prepare to run the remainder of your race well?

The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Over the course of the long race, you may occasionally trip and fall off the path because you lose sight of the heavenly finish line. What kinds of entangling sins tend to draw your eyes away from Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for you?



Looking Ahead, Let's Prepare for the Race

Hebrews 12:1–3

An obstacle like a broken relationship, a painful loss, or a financial crisis can cause anyone to question why God prepared the race the way He did. Have you ever stumbled so painfully that you considered stepping off the course of your Christian race? What ultimately caused you to stay on the path?

Perhaps you've spent the past season of your Christian life running *from* Jesus rather than running *to* Him. You may wonder if you're too far gone. But Jesus Himself said, "And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day" (*John 6:39*).

Jesus won't give up on you, so why should you give up on Him? Start by jogging. Keep your eyes on Him. Soon enough you will be running a race marked by Christlikeness.

ON YOUR MARK. GET SET. GO!



A FINAL PRAYER

Offer your own prayer to God as you conclude your study. Ask Him to give you the strength to finish the race He's prepared for you.

Father,

ENDNOTE

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