

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

15 See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. 16 If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, 20 loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

The Scripture takes place when the people are on the verge of entering into the Promised Land. It is the long-awaited climax of the story. The land is a land of opportunity and prosperity that was promised to their ancestors in Genesis but delayed by slavery in Egypt and forty years in the wilderness.

On more than one occasion I have heard someone say that they want to build a new church that is focused on younger people and families with children. That sounds good at first; after all, we all want to see young families with children in the life of the church. However, the problem with that is that Jesus is for everyone. Many years ago, as I was serving as a lay leader, I overheard someone say “All the young people want to run off us old people.” I found that to be an exaggerated opinion of ill intent. It was based on opinion instead of facts. It lacked consideration and it lacked an effort to understand those that may be different. But they had a right to their opinion. I was of the opinion that something like this takes prayer. We should seek to understand, and focus on a solution. I wondered what gets them to make this type of assumption. We should seek to understand the source of their fear and antagonism and then focus on unity which comes from following Jesus instead of human opinion and anxiety. The problem as I see it is that it is not a matter of one person or one group; the problem is social. We have a societal problem of tension between tradition and contemporary wants. Churches today fit into this societal dilemma where they can tend to focus on either the need to guard tradition or the desire to appeal to contemporary society. After investing some time in prayer and Bible study we can find biblical answers to all of our problems. When I was in High School my best friend’s father was a preacher. He taught me a very valuable lesson. He told me that every problem that I would face in my life is addressed in the Bible. The overall, fundamental lesson of Deuteronomy is that it addresses the problem of a gap between tradition and the contemporary generation.

Churches today fit into the societal dilemma of focusing on guarding tradition or appealing to contemporary society. When we go way back into the Old Testament, we can see and learn that the book of Deuteronomy addresses the problem of the gap between tradition and a contemporary generation. It’s not about what you do or how you

do it. That's just a matter of method and God doesn't care about your method as long as it is reverent. What matters is your degree of devotion. When you are faithful, the love of God replaces fear and anxiety. Deuteronomy instructs the audience to become faithful to the scriptures.

The fundamental tenet of the Scripture is a contrast between life and prosperity, vs. death and adversity. The determining factor is obedience. If you obey God, you get a life of prosperity. This is for the whole community. It is wonderful, fantastic, terrific good news. This is as good as it gets. God loves you! In a loving relationship it is only fair to love God back. This is a very significant and beautiful thing - falling in love with God. When you fall in love, you change your behavior. The negative emotions and bad behaviors are erased and replaced with the beauty of love. Your relationship changes into one of cohesiveness as you fit into the relationship. When you love the Lord, you walk in the path of righteousness, you observe the commandments. You do this out of love, respect, and honor. When you are true to the loving relationship, you receive the rewards of that loving relationship. You receive a blessing from God. The nation of Israel received a gift of fruitful land, prosperity, and protection from their enemies. However, the loving relationship requires faithful endurance. So, there is a caution issued to the people from God. If you dishonor the agreement of this loving relationship, if you turn away from the agreement, don't listen, are led astray, or are unfaithful, you will die and lose the land. This agreement is a covenant between God and the people of God and it is repeated several times in the Bible. It is an emphasized, fundamental tenant of Bible, you have to stay true to God.

A loving relationship is the very best thing you can hope for. When you love and obey the Lord you get a terrific blessing. However, it requires a commitment from both parties. If you reject God's love it leads to devastation. We worship because of God's love. We love God and God loves us. It does not matter how you worship as long as you are obedient, reverent, and respectful. When you are in a loving relationship with God, you also honor, respect, and love what God loves most - all the other people that God created.