COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

CHOSEN TO STAND OUT



Why Do *You* Keep the Sabbath?

7 Tips for a Daily Bible Study Habit

(Re)Reading Moses' Second Law: *How Deuteronomy Interprets Your Past, Present, and Future*

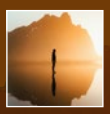
Love Across the Miles

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COMPASS CHECK

Compass Check is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, *an International Association* (UCG*IA*). Our name, *Compass Check*, refers to pointing your spiritual compass toward God. Our goal is to inspire readers to respond to the gospel message.

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COMPASS CORNER

Dear Compass Checkers,

I'm so excited to write to you all as the new managing editor of *Compass Check!* I enjoyed reading this magazine as an older teen, so it's really exciting to be involved in the process of putting together an issue each quarter.

To share a bit of my background, I grew up in the Church in a small congregation in New Hampshire. I moved to Ohio when I was 16 and graduated high school there. I went on to get a bachelor's degree in English before attending ABC and later worked as managing editor of internal publications for UCG for about three years. I now live in Connecticut with my husband.

Growing up in the Church, one thing that was always impressed on me was that one day I'd have to decide if this was *my* Church. If I believed in this way of life and if I would continue developing a relationship with God. I ultimately did make that decision when I grew up. My goal as I edit this publication is to help you on that journey. I recognize that it's different for every person. We all have different questions we need answered, different backgrounds as we approach our relationship with God, and different situations in our lives that affect our day-to-day.

To that end, we cover a variety of topics in Compass Check, as you know! In this issue, we cover topics such as:

- What the book of Deuteronomy can teach us today
- How to create a permanent Bible study habit
- Navigating how to stand out in the world
- Keeping the Sabbath today
- Advice for long-distance relationships (let's face it, more common in our church organization than almost anywhere else!)

My prayer is that this magazine continues to enrich your life, helping you move forward confident in the truth you understand and equipped with the tools you need to prove all things.



Ariana Vazquez
Managing Editor of Compass Check *magazine*

Why Do *You* Keep the Sabbath?

by Sal Cimino, Jr.



Do you find it difficult to keep the Sabbath?

Do you ever wish you could just hang out with your friends on a Friday night or go to a high school football game? Growing up in the Church, I had those same thoughts.

I used to play baseball—and I was pretty good. I remember one Friday when I was 13, I was pitching in a game that started at 7:00 p.m. We were winning 2–0, and I had 12 strikeouts through five innings. Sundown was at 8:30. As I made my final pitch, I handed the ball to my coach and told him I had to leave. His face showed shock and disappointment. He said, "You can't leave now. We need you." I told him I had to go—it was almost sundown, and I didn't want to break the Sabbath.

That night, I was torn. I was proud I honored God, but I also felt like I let down my team. Then, around 9:30, there was a knock on the door. My dad called me downstairs and said, "You have a visitor." It was my coach—with my whole team behind him. He said, "We won the game—and we couldn't have done it without you." My teammates hugged me, and then my coach handed me the game ball—everyone had signed it. I was stunned.

THE SABBATH IS A DAY TO REFLECT ON HIS GOODNESS, HIS PROMISES AND HIS KINGDOM. IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT PHYSICAL REST—IT'S ABOUT SPIRITUAL CONNECTION.



I remember going upstairs and thanking God for His favor and kindness.

You'd think after something like that, I'd never be tempted to break the Sabbath. But years later, after I had kids, I walked away from the truth. I became my kids' Little League coach—and yes, they played and I coached on the Sabbath.

Looking back, I regret ever turning my back on God and breaking His Sabbath. I had always known about the Sabbath—but I never truly understood why I kept it.

Do you?

Let's look at three reasons why we should keep the Sabbath day:

1. GOD MADE THIS DAY FOR YOU

Genesis 2:1-3 says: "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."

God Himself rested on the seventh day. The Hebrew word for rested is *shabath* which means "to desist from exertion." The One who created everything stopped working on this day. Not only that—He blessed the day and sanctified it (set it apart and made it holy).

Before God created time, there was no Sabbath—no days of the week. He created the day and night structure and time itself in Genesis 1. He made this special day for us, as we read in Mark 2:27, "And He [Christ] said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.'"

God set the perfect example so we could also stop our usual activities and spend this day with Him.

As a kid, I spent a lot of time with my grandparents because both of my parents worked. But on my dad's day off, he'd take me to the park. We'd talk, eat, play ball—it was our time together. I looked forward to it.

Do you look forward to spending time each week with your Heavenly Father?

Psalm 63:1, "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water."

Have you ever gone a whole day without water? Your lips crack, your throat tightens—you long for refreshment. That's how we should feel about God's Sabbath. All week long we face work, school, stress. Then He gives us a full day to rest, recharge and reconnect with Him.

2. IT'S A COMMAND FROM GOD

God gave us commandments to protect us, guide us, and teach us how to love Him and others. They're not suggestions—they're commands. The Hebrew word means "to give a charge." When God says something, we're meant to listen and obey.

Exodus 20:8-11, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor

It's not just a day off. It's a mark of who you are—it shows the world (and reminds you) who you serve. The Sabbath is God's way of identifying His people.

your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

God tells us to remember the Sabbath. Why? Because we forget. As a teen, I often forgot to take out the trash or clean my room, even though my parents reminded me. Sound familiar?

God doesn't want us to forget this day. He knows how much we need it. The Sabbath is a day to reflect on His goodness, His promises and His Kingdom. It's not just about physical rest—it's about spiritual connection.

Now, this doesn't mean we sleep the whole day away. It means we rest from normal routines and give God our full attention. If you ever wonder what's appropriate on the Sabbath, imagine Christ is right beside you. Ask, "Would this please Him? Would He do this?"

3. IT'S A SIGN BETWEEN YOU AND GOD

Ezekiel 20:12, "Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them."

The word sign means a signal, a beacon, a monument.

Think of it this way:

- If you live in the U.S., your flag is the American flag.
- If you're in France, your monument might be the Eiffel Tower.
- In North Carolina, a familiar beacon is the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse.

In the same way, the Sabbath is God's sign that you belong to Him. When you keep the Sabbath, you're saying, "I'm in a relationship with the God who created everything." That's powerful.

It's not just a day off. It's a mark of who you are—it shows the world (and reminds you) who you serve. The Sabbath is God's way of identifying His people.

So next time your friends want to hang out on Friday night, or your boss asks you to work Saturday, remember why you keep the Sabbath:

- God made this day for you.
- He commanded you to keep it.
- It's a sign between you and Him.

God didn't just ask us to do something for no reason—He gave us a gift. One day each week to pause, reflect, rest and be with Him. What a blessing!

Will you choose to honor it? **CC**





Sal Cimino Jr. lives in Tampa, Florida, and attends UCG with his wife, Tina. He is the proud father of three grown children and cherishes every moment he can spend with his four grandchildren.



CHOSEN TO STAND OUT

by Becca Perkins



Have you ever felt

like you just don't belong? Like no matter how hard you try, you don't quite fit in at school, church, on your team, or online? Don't feel like you're alone; many teens struggle with the feeling of being out of place. In a world full of teen influencers and trends, we feel pressured to try to fit in. You might start wanting to seem "normal," making you lose your confidence in who you are. It's easy to start thinking you have to change to be accepted.

But here's the truth: we were never made to fit in. We were made to stand out and be a light to this world. Your value is not higher because you have popular friends. Your worth comes from something deeper and more powerful: who God says you are. And when we begin to see ourselves like God sees us, our confidence starts to grow. The Bible is not silent about this. In Ephesians 2:10, it says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." This verse is telling us that God made us, and He is our Maker. These verses are very hope-filled and give us a boost of confidence.

YOU WERE MADE WITH PURPOSE

Jeremiah 1:5 says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

While this verse is specific to Jeremiah's role, it is a powerful reminder that you are not a person who should be trying to fit in. Before your parents ever held you in their arms, God already knew you. God designed us with care and with a purpose for life and love.

It might be tempting to act like someone you're not in order to fit in, but you doing that is just making it harder to grow into the person God created us to be. The confidence rolls in when we start to love who God made us to be. God made the stars and the oceans and He also made us. We are valuable and we are needed to grow in the earth, so we can be sons and daughters in Christ.

GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOU

Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and hope." This verse is telling us how great God's plan is! Life gets very confusing and lonely. Have you ever thought of saying "why am I going through this?" or "Why is it me who always gets put through trials?" Well, you are not alone in this journey because God never forgot about you. A verse that actually states this is Isaiah 43:2: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you." This verse is very important because we always want to know if God is with us. In fact, God is looking down at you right now and He is just so proud of who you have become.

It's easy to want to compare your life to someone else's "perfect life." Maybe someone you know has more confidence than you, or they seem like they have more friends. God does not make mistakes in our story. Your chapter of life in your story does not have to fit in the line of someone else's. Be confident that God is watching over you and He will be with you!

When we stop chasing the approval of someone, we can start trusting God's plan for us and we will begin to live in something called peace. Even if your path is bumpy or has some work ahead, that doesn't mean that you should throw away your confidence. If you walk the road ahead with faith, that's where your confidence will grow. Trusting our God will help us believe the future is in good hands.

YOUR DIFFERENCES ARE YOUR GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 says "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities



of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all."

We don't have to worry about being like someone else to be important. God made each of us different in some way. God never looked at you and wished you were someone else. In the passage, Paul talked about how God gives different gifts to different people. People can be good at so many different things, but you have to remember your attributes! I get told a lot that I'm a very outgoing person and I care about people. For example, one week I wrote Sabbath notes and gave them out to people I did not even know; those little things light up someone's day. Just because someone is loud or outgoing does not mean the person who is quiet is not as valuable. We need both loud and quiet people in this world!

Maybe you are not athletic, but you can paint, or you are not loud, but you are quiet and like to write. Sometimes you might feel awkward in groups, but that's okay! What makes you different is what God might want people to be impacted by. When you focus on yourself, you start to discover your gifts, and that is just gorgeous.

What makes you different is what God might want people to be impacted by.

FITTING IN ISN'T WORTH LOSING YOURSELF.

Fitting in is a hard thing, but just imagine if it was easier? You don't have to worry about getting judged, or you don't have to stand out. One thing I have learned is that fitting in often means shrinking who you are! It means hiding yourself and pretending to be someone you are not. Trying to fit in might be nice, but it will be good for the short term, not the long term. After a while, you start feeling empty.

When God called you, He wanted you to be bold, not to be someone else. It might mean you need to stand out sometimes. A lot of teens want to please people, but they always go down a hole where they lose themselves trying to please someone, putting so much effort in, while the person they seek to impress isn't doing anything. When you live for popularity, you forget about God, but when you live for God, you might lose some followers—but you find real confidence, peace and purpose. You will find the right people, and they will respect you for being real and upfront.

HOW TO GROW CONFIDENCE

You might have some thoughts on all of this and how to actually apply this into your life. There are some tips on how to get real confidence.

1. Spend time with God.

   Spending time with God is one of the most valuable and important things. Once you get to know Him, you get to know yourself!

2. Reading the Bible regularly.

   God's word will shape you into such an amazing person, and you will see the difference.

3. Stop comparing yourself.

   Your story is supposed to be different from others. Don't try copying and pasting someone else's story because that will get you nowhere.

4. Use your gifts.

   Whether it is just smiling or singing at church, use that gift of yours.

5. Find your people.

   It might take a while to find the real people in life, ones you can truly trust and count on, but it's worth it—I promise.

Now I'm warning you: confidence does not come quickly; you have to grow with it during your life. It will grow and grow, giving you the courage to accomplish more things.

CLOSING WORDS

My journey with confidence is still going. I still struggle with stuff, and that's okay, because we're not all perfect. Remember that you were created with a purpose, and you don't need to fit in all the time because God chose you—and only you—to be yourself.

Don't waste your time trying to be someone else because you should be confident in the one you have right now. Don't seek approval from people: seek approval from the One who made you. God loves us no matter what, and we were never made to fit in, but we were made to be a light to this world. Let yourself shine and be the bright light the world needs right now. **CC**



Becca Perkins is a teen from the Cincinnati East, Ohio congregation. She loves to go to summer camps and see her friends every week!



7 TIPS FOR A DAILY BIBLE STUDY HABIT

That Actually Sticks

by Brianna Foster

Do you read your Bible every day?

At the beginning of each calendar year, many people across America take time to evaluate their lives, think about their goals, and create a list of new habits to get into. For many Christians, one of the top three resolutions listed year after year is building a daily Bible study habit.

And about a month later, Christian or not, most give up and go back to the usual day-to-day routines that they're used to. Sound familiar?

This struggle with consistency isn't unique to our generation—it's been a challenge for believers throughout history. Even in the early Church, people wrestled with sticking to spiritual habits.

The apostle Paul dealt with the same thing back in the first-century Church, when he wrote to Timothy, "Remind them of these things . . . be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:14-15). Paul knew how easy it is for people to lose motivation and fall back into old patterns, which is why he encouraged consistency and diligence in studying scripture.

Our human nature is fickle—we like to stay comfortable, unchallenged and blissfully unaware of our shortcomings. That's why we tend to drop the good habits that challenge us to overcome our weaknesses. And it's why we need to be reminded to stay diligent in studying the scriptures.

Think of it this way—Paul wouldn't have exhorted Timothy to remind his congregation about diligent study if it weren't possible to overcome our human nature!

Let's take a look at seven tips to build a daily Bible study you'll actually stick to—not just this year, but for the rest of your life.



SET A CLEAR GOAL

Start by being clear on exactly what you're aiming for.

As Proverbs 21:5 reminds us, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty." A clear and well-thought-out plan increases your likelihood of success, even in spiritual goals.

Most people miss their goals simply because they don't have any! "I'm going to study the Bible every day" is a vague and non-specific plan, making it hard to stick to. Which parts of the Bible are you going to study? When? For how long?

In the business world, professionals use the acronym SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound) to outline a goal that will actually lead them somewhere.

An example of a SMART goal in regard to Bible study would be something like:

"I am going to study one chapter of the Bible or study for 10 minutes every day until I finish the Old Testament."



CREATE A SCHEDULE

Now that you know what you're going to do, you need to pencil in a time to achieve it.

How much time you spend a day (maybe start with five minutes) or when during the day you choose to study is not the most important thing—just focus on making it consistent!

Some people study better in the morning, some at night. Maybe the best time for you is 15 minutes in the middle of the afternoon on lunch break. Whatever your plan is, make sure it's **something you can consistently stick to**. Repetition is the key to good habit-building.

The early Christians in Berea were praised for this very habit: "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

"THESE [IN BEREA] WERE MORE FAIR-MINDED THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS, AND SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY TO FIND OUT WHETHER THESE THINGS WERE SO" (ACTS 17:11).





UTILIZE MEMORY TECHNIQUES

You know how when you're reading something, you sometimes immediately forget it?

Your eyes are poring over the words, but you aren't actually reading, and you end up having to start all over again?

Yeah, that's normal—but it's also detrimental to Bible study. There's no point in reading if you don't remember what you read!

James 1:23 paints a vivid picture of this phenomenon: "... he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was." We don't want to walk away from Bible study unchanged or forgetful.

So, how do you make it stick?

Well, there are a few techniques you can use. If you have never tried any of them before, test them out and see which one works best for you!

1. REVIEW/SUMMARIZE

Summarize whatever you just read back to yourself out loud when you're done reading. This isn't about reading the chapter out loud. Instead, read the section of scripture, then explain out loud, in your own words, what you just studied to help it stick in your brain.

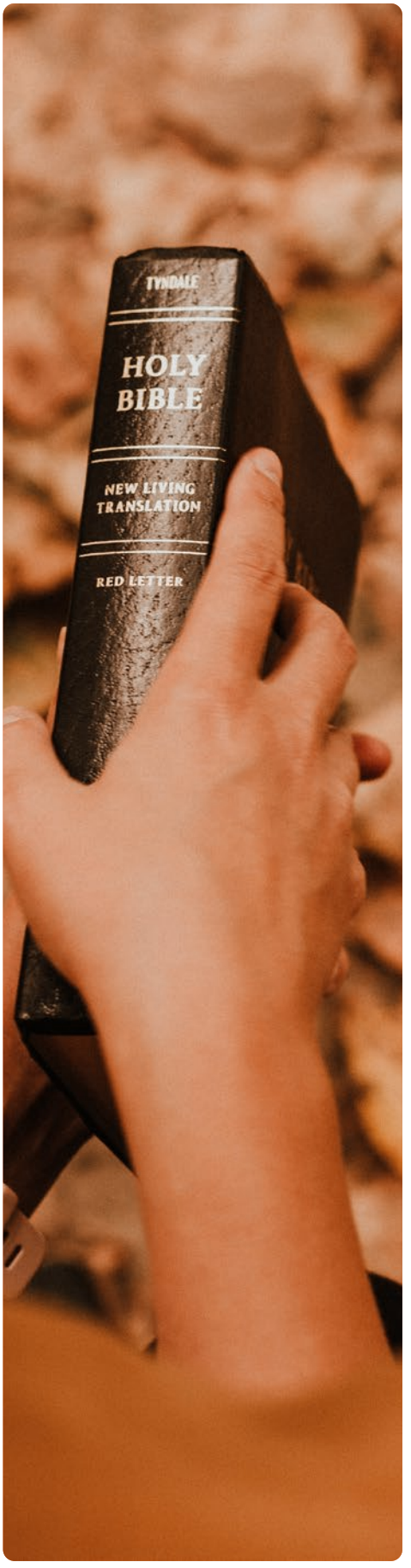
2. NOTE-TAKING

Instead of (or in addition to) saying your summary out loud, write it down. This technique works best when actually writing with pen and paper, as typing into a computer or phone doesn't make the same connection in the brain as writing by hand does.

3. TEACHING

Try to teach someone (i.e., a friend, an unsuspecting sibling, a Bible study partner, a parent, etc.) what you learned as simply as possible. Experts say you have truly mastered a topic if you can explain it clearly and simply to someone who has limited or no knowledge of the subject. This is also one of the best ways to solidify the concept in your mind so that you don't forget it.

The more you practice these techniques, the better they work. Keep at it!





ASK FOR HELP

Reading the Bible can sometimes feel complex. Especially when you're first starting out, there are going to be some things that you just don't understand right away. Fortunately, God has provided teachers for you for just this reason.

Proverbs 12:15 reminds us, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise." Seeking guidance in spiritual matters is a sign of wisdom, not weakness.

Your local pastor was specially ordained and specifically trained to help you understand complex spiritual topics. Ask him for help! Don't worry if you don't know him all that well—he will be delighted to hear from you and more than happy to help you.

Your local elders are your pastor's main support. If he's not immediately available, you can ask one of them for help as well.

God promises to help you, and if you do your part and have faith in Him, He will take you to the finish line.



MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

There is no end to the number of things that can distract you during Bible study time.

It's critically important that you study in a quiet, distraction-free environment. Bible study is like having a one-on-one conversation with your Creator. If a friend of yours were checking their phone or interrupting your conversation every five minutes, how would you feel? Would you walk away feeling like you had a fulfilling conversation?

Minimizing distractions will look different for each person, but some widely applicable tips include:

- Turning your phone off
- Closing your door
- Finding somewhere to be alone
- Wearing noise-cancelling headphones

If you find your mind wandering while you're trying to focus, just know that it's normal to feel that way at first. Most of us don't take the time to sit quietly very often, so our brains will find it hard to focus in the beginning. Just keep at it, and you'll eventually build the skill of being able to focus through your **entire** study time.



TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

One of the most motivational techniques for building a new habit is tracking your progress and celebrating milestones.

As Proverbs 13:19 says, "A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul . . ." Reaching your goals, even small ones, brings a deep sense of satisfaction and encourages you to keep going.

Starting any new habit is hard, but Bible study is particularly challenging because it requires focus and energy and reveals parts of ourselves that need changing (yuck). So celebrate your wins!

Download a habit tracker app or dedicate a notebook to keep track of your progress. Mark it down and celebrate with your favorite sweet treat or fun activity when you hit a new milestone, like "finished ten chapters of Genesis" or "studied the Bible every day for one week."

Unfortunately, using a habit tracker works both ways. It shows you your successes but also your failures.

One of the most common pitfalls of creating new habits is when you miss a day (or two, or three . . .). Our natural human response is to beat ourselves up, mope and give up on what we are trying to accomplish. Don't fall into the trap of punishing yourself for messing up (spoiler alert: you're going to mess up, just like everybody else!).

Godly repentance leads us to **take action**, to **change** what we are doing, and to **go in the opposite direction**. That process applies to Bible study habits as well. Remember, the only real way you can fail is by not trying at all. So when you miss a day, simply get up and try again tomorrow.



STAY MOTIVATED

It's easy to let a new habit slip. It takes a person an average of 66 days (or just over two months) of consistent behavior, to form a new habit.

Paul encouraged the believers in Corinth to follow through on their intentions when he wrote, "Now finish the work so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means" (2 Corinthians 8:11, New International Version). The same applies to your commitment to daily Bible study.

So, how can you stay motivated as you incorporate your new Bible study techniques?

Humans are very emotional creatures, and our motivations are far more rooted in feelings than in logic. While you do have a logical reason for studying scripture every day, and that logical reason is valid and true, **your motivation for sticking to it lies in your emotions**.

Remember how you felt when your friend at school challenged you on a biblical question, and you couldn't answer them?

Or when your dorm parent at camp asked you to repeat a biblical concept that you should know, but you just couldn't remember?

Or maybe you're feeling scared by all of the biblical prophecy unfolding around you, and wishing you had studied more.

We've all had moments when a Bible question caught us off guard or when we wished we'd studied a little more. But every bit of effort you invest now helps replace that uncertainty with confidence. Imagine how fulfilling it will feel to speak boldly when your faith is challenged, and how much calmer you'll feel as you understand more of God's plan through prophecy. Not only will you gain confidence in answering questions about your faith—you'll also grow closer to God as you learn to apply His Word in your life.

Finally, remember that **God is always with you**. When He called you into His church, He already knew your limitations. He promises to help you, and if you do your part and have faith in Him, He will take you to the finish line.

As James 1:25 says, "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." Blessings come not just from reading—but from continuing in the Word daily. Let this be your starting point.

You've got this. **CC**



Brianna Foster is a San Antonio/Austin–based UCG member and copywriter who juggles deadlines with Disney trip planning, Boston Terrier snuggles, and an ongoing quest to try every new Starbucks drink.

(Re)READING MOSES' SECOND LAW

How Deuteronomy Interprets Your Past, Present, and Future

by Kevin Greer



ChatGPT

When time's running out, you say what really matters. You don't mince words or fret about trifles. You speak the truth.

Before Moses died, he spoke to the Israelites as they went to enter the Promised Land. Having just completed four decades of immaturity, wilderness wandering, and heavenly provision, Israel was ready to grow into an established nation.

These final speeches of Moses make up the book of Deuteronomy, the conclusion of the Pentateuch—the five books of the Torah, the Law—and transition Israel's story into the historical books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Deuteronomy marks a physical and spiritual crossroads for God's People.

You might find your own life at a crossroads. Where should I live when I grow up? Should I go to college, trade school, or take a job? Do I want to keep going to church and assembling for the Holy Days?

Let's examine Moses' instruction to Israel for insight into handling these jumping-off points. By closely reading and rereading Deuteronomy, we can learn God's instructions for our lives: past, present and future.

REMEMBERING YOUR PAST

At the beginning of Deuteronomy, Moses devotes plenty of space to recounting Israel's history in the wilderness. God was with Israel every step of the way in its wanderings.

When Israel encountered adversarial kings like Sihon and Og in the wilderness, God gave Israel the victory: "Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against us to battle, and we conquered them. We took their land and gave it as an inheritance" (Deuteronomy 29:7-8; 2:24-3:11). Israel could not have defeated these mighty giants on its own, but was dependent on the Lord for deliverance.

Likewise, you need to remember your story. Think about the times that God gave you victory, or saw you through a difficult time, whether it was at school, work or in your family life. I think of times I felt anxious or worried; I remember and now see how God worked through the situation to bring a result I cherish, in spite of my nerves! You could also reflect

thankfully on what blessings you've received, taking nothing for granted, like unexpected moments of praise.

Forty years earlier, Israel was told to enter Canaan: "Nevertheless you would not go up," Moses said, "but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; and you complained in your tents" (1:26-27). Because of this refusal to enter the Promised Land, Israel wandered around the desert for those forty years.

When you think about your past, there will always be things you are not proud of. Things you regret. Things you wish you could take back and do over.

While we cannot change the past, we can put those deeds behind us. God says, "return to Me, and I will return to you" (Zechariah 1:3, compare Deuteronomy 30:2). We must humbly live in light of the victories God gives us, including over our shortcomings and wrongdoings. It is the lessons we learn from difficult times that drive us to further demonstrate trust and loyalty in Him.

TEN WORDS FOR TODAY

The Hebrew name for the book of Deuteronomy is *Devarim*, or simply, "the words," from the book's opening line: "These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel" (1:1).[1] Of special emphasis are the Ten Words, or as they're conventionally translated, the Ten Commandments (4:13).[2]

This section of Deuteronomy is introduced in 4:44, "Now this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel." Moses calls the people to hear, learn, and carefully obey this instruction, first by reminding them that the Lord made a covenant with Israel at Horeb (5:2).

A covenant is a committed, personal relationship which formally binds parties to specific obligations and benefits, with penalties for failing to maintain it.[3] However, Moses emphasizes "the LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with *us*, those who are here *today*, all of us who are alive" (5:3, emphasis added throughout).

This generation was not alive during the Exodus, and nearly all of those alive back then had died in the wilderness (1:34-38). Yet, the wilderness generation was just as accountable to God for this law and covenant, as if they were present with God and Moses at Horeb themselves. Each Israelite was to think of themselves as having come out of Egypt and having heard God's voice from the mountain.

The Sabbath commandment accentuates this point. While Exodus 20:11 connects the Sabbath to creation, Deuteronomy underscores the Exodus. "Remember that *you* were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought *you* out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (5:15). We remember God not only as our Creator but also as our Redeemer from Egypt on the Sabbath day.[4]

We ought to obey God today with the same closeness and thankfulness as that generation, owing Him allegiance over all others, and being attentive to His Word. This is true whether we are hearing God's truth for the first time or if we have heard it our whole childhood, as second-, third- and fourth-generation Christians. Whether you have a dramatic, walking-through-waters calling, or one that simply sustains you through the wilderness, it is no less a gracious miracle and a provision of God. And the same response is owed to both: faithfulness.

While the word "Deuteronomy" means "second law," it's more than just a static copy of what's already been said. Here, Moses "began to explain this law" (1:5).[5]

The bulk of Deuteronomy's content and structure is Moses' exposition of the Ten Commandments in order (6:1-26:19, see table). One good exercise is to read through Deuteronomy and see how this outline makes sense, or if any parts surprise you. Perhaps you've heard that

COMMANDMENT[6]	EXPOSITION IN DEUTERONOMY
I: The LORD is God	6:1–11:32
II: Idolatry	12:1–13:18
III: Bearing God's Name	14:1–29
IV: Sabbath Observance	15:1–16:17
V: Honor Father and Mother	16:18–18:22
VI: Murder	19:1–22:8
VII: Adultery	22:9–23:14
VIII: Theft	23:15–24:7
IX: Lying	24:8–25:4
X: Coveting	25:5–26:19

The bulk of Deuteronomy's content and structure is Moses' exposition of the Ten Commandments in order.



Proverbs is 31 chapters long, so it can be read in a month at one chapter per day. Deuteronomy is about the same!

COVENANT KEEPER

One of Moses' last exhortations to Israel was to enter into and remember its covenant relationship with God (chapters 27-30). Like Israel, God calls His people today into a relationship with Him in the New Covenant. This call is initiated by God and formalized by repentant baptism and the laying on of hands. Whatever decisions you make in life, God is calling you to this baptism.

Despite instruction and encouragement, in his final hours, Moses knew Israel would not be faithful, but utterly faithless. Rather than success in the covenant, the people would fail. "They will turn to other gods and serve them . . . they will provoke Me and break My covenant" (31:20, compare 4:25-28). They did not have hearts to hear and obey God (29:4; 5:29). Thus, they fell under the curse: "Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them" (27:26).

When Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and died, He addressed the cursing that the covenant required. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse *for us*" (Galatians 3:13).

Jesus died the death we deserved, so we could walk in newness of life: the good works of righteousness He prepared for us (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 2:10). Where we broke and failed to remember the covenant, Jesus succeeded, and He set an example that we might follow.

Moses promised the Lord would raise up another "Prophet like me." Rather than disloyalty and rebellion, the outcome with this Man would be different: "Him you shall hear" (Deuteronomy 18:15). By changing the hearts of the people—of us—we are enabled to heed God's commands (30:6; 10:16).

These and more are the abundant blessings we have in Jesus Christ. We receive the New Covenant, deliverance from death, and empowerment by the Spirit to faithful obedience. And indeed, we anticipate a future when "there shall be no more curse" (Revelation 22:3).

God asks you to walk with Him—to choose life—with your whole life: your past, your present and your future (Deuteronomy 30:11-20). I don't know your plans for tomorrow, but I know that the words He taught , those thousands of years ago in the desert, continue to be a wellspring of life for me and for His faithful servants around the world.

Do you struggle with self-confidence? Remember and give thanks to God, the Giver of all good gifts, who redeemed you and gave you victories.

Do you deal with regret? Take courage and comfort in the Lord who heals the whole person and qualifies us to walk in new paths.

Do you seek knowledge and understanding? Read the words of this book, meditate on them, and do all you can to live by them. Then read them again (31:10-11; 17:19).

Do you feel alone? Jesus has not left you behind but is saving a people out of Egypt, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18).

Do you fear what God will cost you, what you'll have to give up if you really follow Him? Realize your possessions and accomplishments in this world are temporary, and He has covenanted to give you a Promised Land—with a vocation, blessings and family—which will never pass away. For we "shall inherit all things" (Revelation 21:7).

So, at the crossroads, go forward in faith and in courage. "The LORD your God" is your life and "the One who goes with you" (Deuteronomy 31:6). **CC**



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LOVE



A C R

When I was 15 years old, I met my future husband at a Church summer camp in Alaska. We were both there for the same reason—to grow closer to God, spend time with other young people who shared our faith, and of course, to have fun! I wasn't expecting to meet anyone special that year. But then there was this tall, kind, slightly shy guy who made me laugh and who genuinely listened when I talked.

There was only one problem. We lived over 1,000 miles from each other.

By the time camp ended three and a half weeks later, we felt like best friends, but I didn't know if much would come of it. After all, what were the chances that two teenagers could make a relationship work from opposite ends of the country? But one week later, a letter showed up in my mailbox. It was from him. That letter turned into many letters, then long phone calls, then planned visits during school breaks.

We ended up dating long-distance for five and a half years before we got married. I wish I could tell you that we did everything perfectly, but we didn't. We stumbled through misunderstandings, had seasons of frustration and made some immature choices along the way. But we also learned a lot—lessons that shaped not only our relationship, but our walk with God.

If you're in a long-distance relationship now—or you think you might be someday—I want to share something I wish I had understood from the beginning: relationships that honor God are built on strong communication. And I don't just mean texting or calling each other every day. I mean what I like to call the "three C's" of communication.

These are three conversations that should be happening all the time if you want to build a relationship that lasts:

1. Communication with God
2. Communication with each other
3. Communication with good counsel

1. COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

If you want a relationship that honors God, He has to be at the center of it. That's true whether you live next door to each other or halfway around the world. But long distance adds extra challenges—there's more room for doubt, insecurity and assumptions. The only way to navigate that well is to be anchored in God's Word and in prayer.

When my husband and I were dating, there were days when I felt lonely or unsure if the distance was worth it. On those days, prayer became my lifeline. I had to remind myself that my worth didn't come from whether or not he called me that night or whether or not we could see each other soon—it came from being a child of God. I talked to God constantly about my hopes for this relationship, and also my fears and concerns about navigating that part of my life.

Philippians 4:6-7 says: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (New International Version).

That verse doesn't promise that God will give us everything we want in a relationship. It promises something better—a peace that guards our hearts and minds. And when you're in a long-distance relationship, a guarded heart is essential.

Practically speaking, communication with God means spending time in prayer daily, reading His Word and asking Him to shape your character so that you can be the kind of person your future spouse needs. It also means being willing to listen if God redirects your relationship. A truly God-centered relationship is one where both people are willing to follow His lead, even if it's not the path they expected.

2. COMMUNICATION WITH EACH OTHER

It might sound obvious that you need to communicate with the person you're dating, but here's the thing—long-distance communication takes more intentionality than you might think.

When you live close to someone, you can read their body language, hear their

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tone of voice, and see how they respond to situations. But when you're far away, most of your connection happens through words—phone calls, messages and maybe video chats. That means you have to be extra clear, extra patient and extra honest.

One of the biggest lessons my husband and I learned during those years was the benefit of spending hours talking on the phone. This was before cell phones, texting and video chats, so conversation was all we had. Between visits, we relied on long-distance phone calls, handwritten cards and letters to stay connected. Those long talks and written words taught us how to truly communicate with each other, laying a strong foundation for our marriage.

Here are a few tips we found helpful:

- Set regular times to talk so you both have something to look forward to
- Be honest about your feelings—don't expect the other person to guess
- Share the little things from your day, not just the big events
- Listen to understand, instead of just waiting for your turn to speak

Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (King James Version). The way you speak to each other matters. Use your words to encourage, not to tear down. Use them to build trust, not to create suspicion.

And remember, if marriage is the goal, your conversations now are building the habits you'll carry into marriage later. If you practice healthy, respectful communication while you're apart, you'll be better prepared for the days when you're together every day.

3. COMMUNICATION WITH GOOD COUNSEL

This might be the most overlooked "C" in long-distance relationships. When you're far away from each other, it's easy to create a little "bubble" where it feels like it's just the two of you against the world. But God designed relationships to be lived out in community.

Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (NIV). You need wise voices in your life—parents, pastors or mentors—who can help you navigate the unique challenges of long-distance dating.

For us, having older Christians we could talk to was huge. Sometimes they affirmed that we were handling things well. Other times, they gently pointed out areas where we needed to grow. It wasn't always fun to hear, but it was always helpful.

Good counsel keeps you grounded. It helps you see blind spots, keeps you accountable to your values, and reminds you of the bigger picture—preparing for a marriage that honors God.

If you don't have that kind of support yet, pray for it. Look for people in your congregation who model the kind of marriage you admire. Be humble enough to invite their input, and wise enough to listen when they speak.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

I won't sugarcoat it—long-distance dating can be hard. There will be days when the miles feel impossible, when you wonder if it's worth it, when you get tired of waiting. But if both of you are committed to the "three Cs"—communication with God, communication with each other and communication with good counsel—you'll be building a relationship that has the right foundation.

When my husband and I finally closed the distance after five and a half years, we were beyond ready to start our life together. But looking back, I can honestly say the long-distance years weren't wasted. They taught us patience. They taught us how to communicate well. And most importantly, they taught us to lean on God above all else.

If you're walking this road now, be encouraged. God sees you. He knows your heart's desires. And if marriage is a part of your future, the lessons you're learning now will be a gift to you and your spouse. **CC**



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A Worldwide *Connection*



In God's Church, we come from many different places across the USA and around the world, forming a truly international community. Though we have different backgrounds, different life stories, different friends and family, one thing unites us and binds us together: our devotion to and our faith in God and Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. As Ephesians 4:4-6 reminds us, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Although we are individuals within the Church, we are one spiritual family, helping and encouraging each other not only every Sabbath, but every day. We have a vast support network that spans the entire world through prayers, cards and letters of encouragement, connecting us in love and fellowship wherever we are.

The friendships and bonds we form at Church will be with us for the rest of our lives. God gives us the opportunity and ability to connect with such a wide range of people who will share the promises of God. As Revelation 7:9 describes: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands." This amazing scripture reveals just how far-reaching God's promises are.

Quickly, imagine a life without attending Sabbath services every week, the Feast every year, camps every summer. How does that make you feel? For me, it is a life I could never imagine. Like you, these events and observances have been engrained in my mind from a very young age, inspiring and motivating me throughout my entire life.

We look forward to every Sabbath not only because it gives us a chance to rest and grow closer to God, but also because it allows us to draw closer to each other. The same is true for the Feast each year. We are so lucky to have a special week where we can gather together in places God has chosen, to see friends we might not see regularly, and to catch up and strengthen our relationships with each other.

Camp is another great example, bringing youth together from across the country and around the world, giving everyone the opportunity to learn more about God and each other. We look forward to every Sabbath, Feast and summer, looking forward to seeing each other again, catching up, sharing hugs and spending time together, all while spending time with God. This excites us and is an incredible blessing from God, giving us these chances to reconnect and build close, lasting relationships.

Our calling is not only the promise of becoming sons and daughters of God but also the privilege of having spiritual brothers and sisters around the globe. Just as it is difficult to imagine a life with no Sabbaths, feasts or camps, it is equally hard imagining a life without our best friends. Whether we have known them our entire life, or new friends we've made over the summer.

Whoever they may be, imagining life without them feels impossible. If you really think about it, the best friends we have now are people we might never have met without God's presence in our life. We must be grateful every day for the friendships we have and for the deep connection we share through the faith.

Another exciting aspect of being in God's spiritual family is knowing we have brothers and sisters across the entire world all believing the same things we do. Anywhere we go, we can search out our fellow Christians, which is such a great privilege and blessing that enriches our life.

Attending Feasts with international brethren, connecting with them, and then being able to visit them at a later time has been something I've been so privileged to experience many times throughout the past few years. While it may seem scary meeting new people from different countries or visiting those countries, God tells us that we are all the same in Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

This scripture reveals the great unifying factor that is at the heart of God's plan for us. In a world where God's laws have been replaced by human reasoning, we must remember we are not citizens of this world, or any earthly nation. Instead, we belong to a higher citizenship. "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). We are all fellow citizens in God's kingdom.

Every time we go to church, the Feast, summer camp, or whenever we are with fellow brethren, we have the opportunity to appreciate the blessing of belonging to God's spiritual family.

However, maintaining connections after Feasts or camps can be challenging even though we've developed close friendships. Fortunately, we live in an age of increased connection around the world, with many opportunities to stay in touch.

We can pick up our laptop or phone and text our friends. Texting is a wonderful way to stay in touch, but it can lose the human element of conversation. Instead of just texting someone, make an effort to pick up the phone and call your friends, or organize a group call with those you met at the Feast or camp.

Hearing a close friend's voice does wonders. It reminds us of the good times we've had together and helps us look forward to the times ahead when we will be together again.

Another practical way to stay connected is to cherish the friends who are right there in your congregation or in a nearby city or state. Make plans to see each other often. Organize activities after church or outside of the Sabbath. Don't neglect the friends who are close, and don't forget about those who are far away. Look ahead to the future and appreciate the times you will be able to see your friends again, whether in this life or in the coming Kingdom of God. God wants us to be together as a godly family. You can do that now by staying connected, making an effort to see brethren and friends, and not letting opportunities to build friendships pass you by.

Remember, you have family in every corner of the world. Whether in your hometown or far away across Asia or Australia, there are always people who love God's way and want to connect with you. God blesses us with friends and loved ones throughout this worldwide connection, reminding us of the support and fellowship we share on the journey. **CC**



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You have family in every corner of the world. Whether in your hometown or far away across Asia or Australia, there are always people who love God's way and want to connect with you.



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