

Living In Between



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Introduction to Deuteronomy



Why read this book?

This book deals with hardship, testing, and doubt, but also with promise, hope, and trust. It reminds us that faith is not automatic or mechanical. Faith becomes personal and active when it springs from a living relationship with a loving God. The message of Deuteronomy can be summed up as follows: “Devote yourself wholeheartedly to God.” This book’s message is especially relevant for the church today.

Who wrote this book?

Moses.

Why was it written?

Deuteronomy records Moses’ final words to the Israelites before they entered the promised land. He challenged the people to obey the Lord faithfully and to reject all forms of idolatry. He called the new generation to formally renew the earlier covenant with God that their parents had broken.

When was it written?

Around 1400 B.C.

What was happening in the world at this time?

The Egyptians to the south and the Hittites to the north of Canaan were the powers of the area, although neither nation was particularly menacing. Canaan was a collection of small city-states sharing a common culture under the political control of Egypt. Egypt’s power was declining, however, and the political climate was becoming increasingly chaotic.



Introduction to Deuteronomy

What to look for in Deuteronomy:

The covenant God makes with the Israelites is similar to treaties ancient Middle Eastern kings made with their subjects. In these treaties, a king imposed certain obligations on his vassals (foreign servants), who were compelled to obey. Deuteronomy's format suggests that the Israelites were servants to the King of kings.

—*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*



The Hardest Part of the Journey

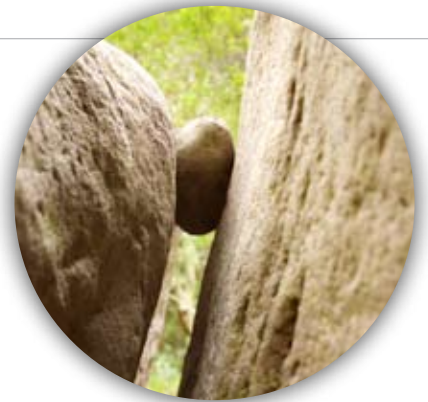
Leader's Guide

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The Hardest Part of the Journey

It's okay to ask, "Are we there yet?"

This Bible study course looks at a book of the Bible that is read less often than others. If we took a survey, it might take the prize for the least-read book of the Bible, finishing just behind Numbers and Leviticus. But we can glean plenty from this book through highlighting some of its important parts.



Scripture: Deuteronomy 1:1–8

Based On: The sermon series "Living in the In-Between," by Shane Hipps, PreachingToday.com



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Leader's Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.*

There's a good reason Deuteronomy is not read very often. To understand why, we need to know that the Old Testament is divided into different sections. The first five books of the Bible form a section known as the Torah or Pentateuch. These are the books of Law. Deuteronomy is the very last book in this section. They are, in order: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. If you read straight through to the end of Numbers, you could simply skip to the end of Deuteronomy, and you'd be at the same place in the narrative. The Book of Numbers ends with wandering ex-slaves gathered on the banks of the Jordan River, waiting to enter the Promised Land. At the end of Deuteronomy, you'll see they haven't moved from this spot. In other words, you could remove this book entirely and not miss a beat in the story.

Another reason Deuteronomy doesn't get read very often is that it's basically all words and almost no action. It's comprised of three sermons by Moses and a set of laws thrown in for the fun of it. Most of the sermons by Moses are retelling stories and laws we've already heard in the previous books. In fact, this is where the name Deuteronomy comes from—*deutero* means “second,” and *nomos* means “law.” It is called the “second law” because it's mostly repetition. If you read this book at a surface level, you might observe that it really has nothing new to say. So I think it's reasonable to wonder why this book is in the Bible to begin with!

But one reason it's worth studying is that Deuteronomy is Jesus' favorite book in the Bible. I know, I know—Jesus doesn't have favorites. But if he did, this book would be it. Not only does he directly quote this book repeatedly, but his teachings and life reflect many of the themes found only in Deuteronomy. Some have called it “the first New Testament,” because it presents an innovation in Israel's theology. It presents a new approach to the old law. In addition, most scholars consider Deuteronomy to be the theological center of the Old Testament, because. In this sense, Deuteronomy is the hidden hand that works the puppet. By understanding Deuteronomy, we pull back the curtain and reveal the intention and direction of this hand. In doing so, we can better understand the books that follow it and even the words of Jesus.

Given Deuteronomy's importance to Jesus and how its subtle power shapes the rest of Scripture, we should take a closer look to discover what it is that Jesus liked so much.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Have you ever read the Book of Deuteronomy all the way through? If so, what was your impression of it?



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[Q] Deuteronomy contains the Ten Commandments. What relevance does that have for us today?

[Q] Why might an understanding of Deuteronomy be foundational for understanding the rest of the Bible?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Deuteronomy is the story of a people in transition.

Read Deuteronomy 1:1–8.

At the beginning of Deuteronomy, we get a clue to the uniqueness of the book. Deuteronomy 1:1: “These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan” Verse 5 says, “Moses began to expound this law”

This passage sets the framework, the context for Moses’ preaching. There are two things that stand out. First, it says, “Moses began to expound the law.” That is, to explain, interpret, and expand on—not simply to speak or introduce the law. In other words, Moses is not simply setting out to repeat the law and the stories in the wilderness; he is setting out to explain and give meaning to the law.

[Q] Give an example of when you have needed a law explained to you—either an ancient or a current law.

Moses doesn’t simply offer a verbatim repetition of the stories and laws. Instead, he offers a creative elaboration and revision of older laws and stories. He is expounding, not simply describing. It is clear that he’s doing this because many of the people of Israel weren’t around for the first giving of the law. But more importantly, this explanation is tailor-made for the completely new situation that these people now find themselves in. This is the second thing about this passage—their new situation.

It says twice that Moses spoke to them beyond the Jordan in the wilderness. If you missed it the first time, he says it again. They are now on the banks of the Jordan River, no longer wandering in the wilderness, but they have yet to enter the Promised Land now visible to them. They are forced to wait in between. They are at the heart of a transition. This is a book about transitions. It is not only the story that presents a transition. Deuteronomy itself is a transitional book. It provides the bridge between the end of the Torah and the beginning of the books of history and the Prophets. The book halts both us as readers and the Hebrew people; it forces us to wait



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before entering the Promised Land to listen to a lengthy, meandering sermon by a very old, wise man.

[Q] Can you sum up briefly what happened to the Israelites before they arrived at this point at the beginning of Deuteronomy?

[Q] Knowing this, why is this a book of transitions?

Read the following verses from the Gospels where the Book of Deuteronomy is quoted or referred to: Matthew 5:21, 38; 13:13; 19:18–19; 23:2; Mark 12:29–33; Luke 2:41; 4:4, 8, 12; 13:14; John 2:13; 3:13; 7:2; 8:5–7.

[Q] What do these verses tell you about the Book of Deuteronomy? How did Jesus use this book to explain things?

[Q] How did Jesus affirm that which was taught in Deuteronomy and expand on it?

[Q] Are there some passages quoted from Deuteronomy that seem hard to you? If so, which ones and why?

Teaching Point Two: The in-between is the hardest part of any journey.

This transition zone is a difficult place to be because it is neither an adventure nor home. The in-between is the hardest part of any journey—where we are asked to wait and listen, not to act or even react. It demands courageous patience and a capacity to endure the unknown. While there is nothing that has to be done or needs accomplishing when we are in between, it is certainly not a place of rest. If it were, we would want to stay “in between.”

Instead, it is a place of restless anticipation. Anyone who has traveled with a child will have heard, “Are we there yet? How much longer?” In the in-between, or times of transition, we revisit this nearly universal childhood frustration and are compelled to ask God the questions, “Are we there yet? How much longer?” It isn't fun, but it is a normal part of a life of faith. It is a normal part of the maturing process.

You may be in the in-between in your own life. You may be aware that a previous era has closed and you are waiting for what is to come. We are invited to wait and listen. Read Psalm 13, when David was in just such an in-between place.

[Q] Have you ever felt forgotten, as David did (v. 1)? If so, what made you feel that way?

[Q] Why does a period of waiting make us feel as though God is hiding his face from us (v. 1)?



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[Q] What might be a good way of “wrestling with our thoughts” (v. 2) during a time of waiting?

[Q] What might be a poor way of “wrestling with our thoughts”?

[Q] Which of the following best describes you as you are waiting to hear from God?

- Impatience
- Anger
- Apathy
- Excitement
- Joy
- Other

[Q] What would you like to feel when you are waiting to hear from God? How can you get there?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us think through what God can do during the in-between times of our lives.*

Activity: *Advise the following people how they can learn to depend on God more during these in-between times:*

- *Hannah is going to turn 30 this year. She's still single and would really like to be married.*
- *Jonathan is stuck in a dead-end job and doesn't think he can leave because his family depends on his income.*
- *Margie would love to have children, but after 15 years of marriage, it doesn't seem like it's going to happen.*
- *Peter is in a wheelchair after a terrible accident. He may never be able to walk again.*



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Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Deuteronomy, a book about the in-between, provides us some helpful guidance and suggestions for living in transition. Let us stand on the banks of the Jordan River and listen to the wisdom of an old man as we wait and hope for God's promises to be fulfilled.

Action Point: While you are in between, ask God, "Are we there yet?" It is a simple but honest prayer that opens our hearts to God and offers our deepest desires, which God longs to hear. Set aside time this week to listen to God as you read his Word. Pick a psalm or even a passage in Deuteronomy, and after you've read it, sit quietly for a while and think about it. Ask God what he wants you to understand about who he is and how he works in your life.

—Study by Shane Hipps, with JoHannah Reardon



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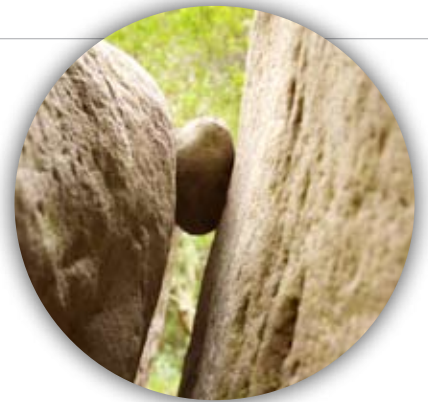
Participant's Guide

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Given Deuteronomy's importance to Jesus and how its subtle power shapes the rest of Scripture, we should take a closer look to discover what it is that Jesus liked so much.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Deuteronomy is the story of a people in transition.

Teaching Point Two: The in-between is the hardest part of any journey.

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Between Memory and Imagination

Leader's Guide

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Between Memory and Imagination

Remembering can give you an identity and a hope.

In our last study, we learned that Deuteronomy is a book about transition. The people of Israel are standing on the banks of the Jordan River with the Promised Land in sight. They are no longer wandering in the wilderness, but have yet to enter the land flowing with milk and honey. They are forced to live in between; they are in transition. Our encouragement in the last study was to live alongside them in between two places. Whether it is the unknown future, grief, or vocational questioning, we are invited to wait in transition. Deuteronomy is an invitation to live in between; however, it is not without guidance. Our passage today gives us an important suggestion for how to live through our in-between times.



Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:15

Based On: The sermon series "Living in the In-Between," by Shane Higgs, PreachingToday.com



Between Memory and Imagination

Leader's Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

The Ten Commandments are the part of Deuteronomy that most of us are familiar with. As a group, name all of the Ten Commandments that you can think of.

When you've named as many as you know, read them in Deuteronomy 5:1–22.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] When did you first hear of the Ten Commandments? As a child? When you became a Christian? Other? What was your impression of them?

[Q] Do you think all of these commandments still apply to us today? If not, which ones don't you think apply today, and why?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Deuteronomy urges us to remember during the in-between.

Deuteronomy is largely a repetitive book; Moses repeats stories and laws from the previous four books of the Torah. While Israel waits on the banks of the Jordan, Moses repeats a previous sermon on the Ten Commandments originally found in Exodus—nothing new here, same old stuff. At least it would appear that way. However, there is something different. Moses makes a subtle adjustment, and it's easy to miss if you aren't looking for it. There is a little verse tucked in near the end of the fourth commandment, which is the commandment to keep the Sabbath. It is a passage that is easy to miss, considering the magnitude of the surrounding material. It sits like a rose planted in a cornfield—towering stalks of corn obscuring it from view. And yet, if our eyes catch this hidden gem, we discover something. We uncover a distinct and dominant theme that runs through the Book of Deuteronomy. It is a theme that offers us one of the keys to living in between. Look again at Deuteronomy 5:15.

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.” There it is, a simple word, the first word in the verse—“remember.” Here, subtly embedded amidst the towering Ten Commandments, is a concept not often noticed until we tune our eyes to look for this word. Once you've tuned in,



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you can hardly escape it. It repeats like waves crashing on the ocean shore. The call to remember echoes over 40 times throughout the Book of Deuteronomy. This is one of the distinctive themes of Deuteronomy.

This is what is so striking about it. We already know that Deuteronomy is simply repeating old material found in previous books. Yet the word “remember” is noticeably absent from these books. When you look at Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, it only appears 12 times in all the books combined. And in nearly every case, the word *remember* shows up as something God does. It refers to God remembering his covenant with his people.

Deuteronomy reverses this. It is, in contrast, a call for us to remember God's faithfulness in the past. Read the following verses that speak of remembering: Deuteronomy 7:18; 8:2; 15:15; 16:12; 24:9, 18, 22; and 32:7.

While we live in between, while we are in transition, we are called to remember God's faithfulness. If you're wondering, *What am I supposed to do while I'm waiting for what is next?*, Deuteronomy tells us to remember.

[Q] People like to remember good times in the past. How would you define the difference between nostalgia and the kind of remembrance that Deuteronomy talks about?

[Q] What event(s) in your life do you look back on as special evidence of God's love and care for you, and how does this remembrance affect your walk with God today?

[Q] Why is it important to focus on what God has done and not just on our own experiences?

[Q] The children of Israel quickly forgot God's powerful interventions on their behalf once they experienced the difficulties of the wilderness. What perceived needs caused their focus to shift from God to their own circumstances?

[Q] What things in your life cause you to forget what God has done for you?

Teaching Point Two: Remembering gives us identity.

One reason remembering is so important is that in times of transition we wonder about our sense of self—our identity is at stake. We know who we were, but not who we will be. God shows us something here—he knows that memory determines identity. The things we choose to remember about our past are the things that shape our identity.

One of the things we learn from these passages is that Moses is concerned that the younger generation will forget who they were when they enter the Promised Land. That's why he says,



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“Remember that you were slaves,” over and over. Remember where you came from. It is the difficulty in the desert that made you who you are. When you enter the posh comfort of a land flowing with milk and honey, remember that your identity was forged by the pressure and persecution of slavery. In this transition, Israel was getting a history lesson in order to tether them in a time of uncertainty and drifting.

It is often said that the younger generation is the future of the church. While that is true, the older generation is just as much a part of that future. They hold our collective past and thus our current and future identity. Their memories and stories of God's faithfulness have the power to both ground our identity and unleash a vital and vibrant future.

For this reason, may we heed Moses' call: “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.” This call to remember is not a call to repeat or relive the past. That is impossible. Instead, it is a call to know the past so that we might know ourselves in times of transition.

[Q] Read Psalm 42:1–5; 63:6–8; 77:1–12; and 119:49–56. In what different situations did the psalmist remember God and his work?

[Q] How did the psalmist respond when he remembered what God had done? Do you think that's the way you would respond? Why or why not?

[Q] How does remembering who God is help us remember who we are?

[Q] In what way do we also need to remember that we were once “slaves”?

Teaching Point Three: Remembering gives us hope.

If our memory determines our identity, there is one other thing it does even more powerfully. Our memory has the power to generate hope in times of transition. By remembering God's faithfulness in the past, we can better imagine a hopeful future. Remembrance is a faith builder during times of transition and uncertainty. All of life is lived between our memory of the past and our imagination of the future. Like a rudder on a ship, our memories powerfully shape and direct our vision of the future. This is the second reason Moses calls Israel to remember.

God wants us to dig up memories of the times he has broken into our lives and encountered us in amazing ways. It's strange how quickly we forget these things. God seems to know this about us—we have short and often fragile memories. This is why, over and over, he calls us to commemorate these events; whether it is stones stacked by a river or tying tassels on the four corners of our garments, Moses exhorts us repeatedly in Deuteronomy to find concrete ways to commemorate these things.



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[Q] In each of these passages, how did a memory of God's past work prompt a desire for present spiritual revival?

- Lamentations 3:19–24, 40–42
- Habakkuk 3:2
- Psalm 44:1–3, 23–26
- Psalm 143:5–12

[Q] What aspects of our corporate Christian worship help us to remember the past in a positive way, and give us hope for the future?

[Q] What attribute of God's gives you the most hope in spite of your circumstances? Why?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To help us remember God and find our hope in him.*

Activity: *Make sure everyone has paper and pen. Ask each person to write down things they consider to be milestones in their Christian lives—times when they have seen God work to answer prayer or change them in some way. When they are finished, ask if anyone would like to share anything they wrote down. Encourage everyone to stick the list in their Bible to refer to in times of discouragement.*

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Today, you have an opportunity to commemorate a time when God met you. While you are in between, what you need most are faith and hope. But faith is something that cannot be effected directly; you cannot muster it by an act of the will. It must be nurtured indirectly, like a flower rooted in soil. Nothing can be done directly to the flower to make it grow; all you can do is nourish and water the soil. The act of remembering is a spiritual practice that nourishes our heart. It is through this that the flower of faith and hope grows.

Action Point: **Using a concordance or Biblegateway.com, do a word search this week on the words *remember, recall, or remind*. Jot down what you learn and share it with a friend.**

—Study by Shane Hipps, with JoHannah Reardon



Between Memory and Imagination

Participant's Guide

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Teaching Point One: Deuteronomy urges us to remember during the in-between.

Teaching Point Two: Remembering gives us identity.

Teaching Point Three: Remembering gives us hope.

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Between Despair and Hope

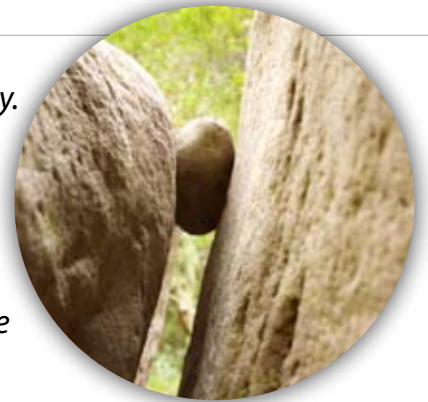
Leader's Guide

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Between Despair and Hope

Our pain is real, but so is God's presence.

This is the final study in our series on Deuteronomy. We have been in between the wilderness and the Promised Land, waiting and listening. We have discovered the importance of memory for our imagination. In this study, we encounter one of the last invitations for living in transition.



Scripture: [Deuteronomy 31:8](#)

Based On: The sermon series "Living in the In-Between," by Shane Hipps, PreachingToday.com



Between Despair and Hope

Leader's Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

Note to leader: Provide each person with the Participant's Guide, included at the end of this study.

Deuteronomy is an incredibly honest book. In many ways, it reflects our experiences in life. For a lot of us, life doesn't wrap up into a nice, neat bow with a happy ending. This is not like a sitcom where all of life's conflicts and troubles are wrapped up in 30 minutes. No, Deuteronomy presents us with the harsh realities of life and of living in between.

We have all moved through deep suffering and great loss of various kinds. Dreams have been dashed, and we've had to learn to cope. This book affirms our reality. And while the end of this book suggests this, this is not the ultimate message of Deuteronomy. This is not a call for us to simply cope with difficult times; we are called into something much bigger. We are called to hope.

This is not a call to hope in the perfect fulfillment of all our desires. This is a call to hope in something much more abiding—we are called to hope in God's promise of being with us. In spite of all Israel suffered, Moses reminded them (and us), "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." It is a strange kind of boldness that stares down fear, death, and suffering, and proclaims like a trumpet in the darkness: Do not be afraid; the Lord will be with you.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] How can our painful memories become a valuable part of the positive remembering advocated in the Bible?

[Q] What do you feel is the key to transforming past pain into present gain?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Deuteronomy is painfully realistic.

Deuteronomy has a strikingly sad ending. This is the last book in the Torah—a section of the Bible that is organized around the promise of land for the people of Israel. Yet the promise is not fulfilled. Deuteronomy ends with the hope of entering the land, but not with the actual fulfillment of that promise. This is like having the Gospel stories leave out the resurrection of Jesus.



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Added to that, the greatest prophet Israel has ever known, who has guided God's people for 40 years through the immense pressures of the wilderness, dies without entering the Promised Land. It is a harsh and difficult ending for both the reader and the characters in the story. We've been asked to wait in between, we've waited, and now we're ready to have the promise fulfilled. Instead, the Torah comes to a close with the nation of Israel still seated on the banks of the Jordan, grieving the death of the greatest leader in their history.

Read Deuteronomy 32:48–52 and 34:1–12.

- [Q] Does God's refusal to let Moses enter the land seem unfair to you? Why or why not?
- [Q] Have you ever felt that God was unfair to you or someone you cared about? How did you deal with those feelings?
- [Q] What would you tell a non-Christian who said that God is unfair?
- [Q] How could Moses be told that he didn't measure up in chapter 32, and then be called the greatest prophet in Israel in chapter 34? What does that tell you about how God works in and through people?
- [Q] Do you catch any glimmer of hope in the passages we just read? If so, what is it?

Teaching Point Two: God promises his presence in the midst of our pain.

Read Deuteronomy 31:8.

This can be a bit baffling. The promise of God's presence in the midst of suffering can seem like a cop out. We often think, *God, it's very kind of you to offer your presence, but your being present isn't going to fix my problems. I've got a better idea: Why don't you stay up there in heaven and undo whatever is happening to me—just wave your magic wand and make this stuff go away.*

We'd like to ignore this promise, but we can't. Even Jesus, in his last words to his disciples, takes a page right out of Deuteronomy and promises his presence, not a perfect life. Right at the end of the Great Commission, his last words are, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." He does not promise that all our dreams will come true. Instead, he promises his presence.

Our problem is that we contemplate God's presence in the abstract. We've forgotten the tangible impact God's presence has on us.



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Leader's Guide

Shane Hipps shares this experience from when he was a hospital chaplain at the UCLA Medical Center:

I was working in the liver unit at the time. UCLA is a level 3 trauma hospital, which means they get all the sickest people around. There was a doctor there who literally wrote the book on liver transplants—one of the most complex transplants you can do. As a result, we saw a lot of very sick patients. I was making my rounds one day, introducing myself to new patients. It's a strange thing, because you never know what you're getting yourself into.

I remember walking into the room of a woman in her late forties. A few family members were with her. She was so jaundiced that even the whites of her eyes were yellow—a sure sign something wasn't working right with her liver. I'd been there long enough not to be shocked by this—it was pretty common. We sat and chatted for a while and I found her to be a full-spirited woman with a great sense of humor. She would joke with me and made it clear she wasn't religious or anything, but she tolerated me anyway. She had just been admitted and didn't know what was wrong with her. They had done some tests and were waiting for the results. As we sat there, the doctor came and told her that they had discovered a cancerous tumor on her liver that was seven inches long. In my experience, tumors are frequently measured in millimeters. This gives you a sense of how significant this was.

When my patient asked what the next steps were, the doctor responded by saying, "The tumor is inoperable, so what we can do is make you comfortable." Everyone was silent. We all knew she had just been given a matter of weeks to live. It was a shock to everyone—myself included. As the doctor left, the woman looked over at me with eyes that said as clear as day: "Okay, chaplain, do your work. What words have you got for me?" I sat looking back at her with nothing to say. There was nothing to say, and I knew it. After what felt like an eternity, she finally looked at her family, looked back at me, and said, "Do you mind giving us a minute?"

My heart sank. "Absolutely." I squeezed her hand and left the room. I was beside myself—why couldn't I have read the situation? She clearly didn't want me there. I was intruding on a personal tragedy—what was I thinking just sitting there like some voyeur? I didn't sleep that night.

The next morning, I went to find her again. I had worked out at least something to say, just to help me feel like I did something. But I couldn't find her. She had been moved to another floor, and they didn't have the new information yet. It was two days later when I found her. I walked into her room, ready to open my mouth, when she interrupted me with, "Shane, I've been looking all over for you!"

I was dumbfounded. She motioned for her family to leave, and when we were alone she invited me to sit at her bedside. She took my hand and said, "I can't tell you how wonderful it was to have you there with me the other day. I didn't have to worry about anything—God, or heaven, or death, or anything after this life. I knew that it was all going to be alright, just by you being there."



Between Despair and Hope

Leader's Guide

Just by my being there. I couldn't believe it. I hadn't done a thing—I hadn't offered any sage wisdom or advice; I had no words of comfort. I was merely silent. All I had to offer was my presence—but it wasn't really my presence. There was nothing special about me, but she experienced God's presence through me. The power of God's presence amidst suffering was made real to me that day. God with us has the power to overwhelm darkness, despair, and doubt. Immanuel—God with us—is at the heart of our gospel. Jesus came to be with us in the dirt, mud, and difficulty of life. God's promise of his presence in Deuteronomy is echoed and fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

[Q] Share a time you've experienced God's presence in a time of pain.

[Q] What does it mean to you that God has promised to “never leave you nor forsake you”?

[Q] Have you heard of a story similar to the one Shane Hipps shared? If so, tell us about it.

[Q] Do you have a favorite verse, hymn, or chorus that helps you remember God's presence when you are going through a difficult time?

Teaching Point Three: We should anticipate God's presence.

If life is difficult, if you find hope elusive while you are in between, you are called to pray to Immanuel—God with us. Pray that God will give you an experience of his presence. God's presence may be experienced in a variety of ways. One of these is God mediated through our community, the people around us. There is an ancient ritual also designed to evoke the mystery of God's presence. We in the Protestant tradition usually miss it.

It is perhaps the oldest and most familiar ritual in the Christian tradition: Communion. And as a symbol, we use it to remember. However, it is more than that. It is also a ritual that invokes God's presence. Is Jesus indeed present through the gathered community celebrating an ancient ritual? We would do well to recover a theology that affirms the mystery of God's presence in Communion. And now, as we live in between, may we experience the presence of God as we partake of the gifts of God.

[Q] Do you think Jesus is present when we practice Communion together? Explain.

[Q] Can you think of any other things we do corporately that help you to experience God's presence?

[Q] Recall a time when you greatly experienced God's presence. What do you think caused that?

[Q] In general, do you tend to experience God's presence in times of pain, or in times of peace and contentment?



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[Q] What does experiencing God's presence have to do with remembering?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To demonstrate the importance of God's presence in our lives.*

Activity: *Hold up an electric power strip with multiple outlets (the kind that computers and appliances are plugged into). Say, "You have all seen one of these. We use power strips to plug computers or appliances into." Then plug one or two appliances and lights into the strip. Finally, plug the power strip into itself and attempt to turn on the lights and appliances. When they don't turn on, ask, "Why won't this work?"*

"Obviously it won't work because the power strip doesn't have any electrical power in itself. It has to be plugged into an electrical outlet in order to bring any power to the other appliances." Then, unplug the power strip from itself and plug it into a wall outlet, so that the appliances and lights turn on. Discuss how this illustrates the importance of being plugged into God's presence in our lives.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Jane Johnson Struck shares this experience:

As a child, I was captivated by Jesus' words on prayer [in Matthew 6:5–6]. ... In the wee ranch house where I grew up, my bedroom was my sanctuary. But my real "inner sanctum," the only space that made me feel uninhibited enough to unload my youthful angst onto God, was my closet. Crouched in its dark, tiny confines, I'd spill tears of anger and words of confusion over childhood slights and perceived parental wrongs. I took God literally at his word, going into the only secret place I had, trusting that my heavenly Father, who saw my hidden heartbreaks, would meet me there.

As I matured and moved away from home, this habit fell by the wayside. After all, how convenient is a literal prayer closet in a dorm room, an apartment with a roommate, or a home shared with a spouse?

But several years ago, I rediscovered the power of closeted prayer. My husband was recovering from a routine, out-patient surgery that had unexpectedly revealed a suspicious tumor. That afternoon, my husband and I were scheduled for a follow-up with the surgeon to review pathology results.

As my husband slept downstairs on a recliner, I stood before our bedroom mirror, struggling to make myself presentable for the upcoming physician visit. My stomach



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knotted with apprehension, my face haggard from worry, I was so overwhelmed with distress that I walked into our closet, shut the door, flung myself onto its floor, and broke down in the darkness. *God! God! I flailed. Help me! I'm frightened my husband has cancer! I'm so afraid of losing him!*

Somewhere between my flowing snot and convulsive sobs, God's presence filled that closet. His voice—in audible, yes, but clearer than any sound I've ever heard—told me, "Everything will be OK."

That stunning and unexpectedly powerful encounter left me almost dizzy. I arose, blew my nose, wiped tears off my face, and suddenly felt electrified by an unassailable sense of God's absolute control over our scary circumstances. God—the God of the universe!—had seen my distress in that secret space and had chosen to personally comfort me. And although my husband's diagnosis turned out to be the one we'd dreaded, God graciously restored my beloved to health, fulfilling what God had told me he'd do in the secrecy of my closet.

I'll never forget that experience. Since then, whenever I need to process and pray with a candor I'd feel uncomfortable sharing among others, I head toward my walk-in closet. There I momentarily shut out distractions and concentrate on seeking God alone, in secret. For the last few weeks, I've been going there often, agonizing over some transitions in my life, seeking his guidance and grace. But I'm confident that as I surrender myself, surrounded by clutter and chaos and funk, my heavenly Father, who sees what is done in secret, once again will be faithful.

Action Point: Set aside at least an hour this week to go into your "closet." Take time to read a passage of Scripture and to just sit quietly and meditate on the presence of God.

—Study by Shane Hipps, with JoHannah Reardon



Between Despair and Hope

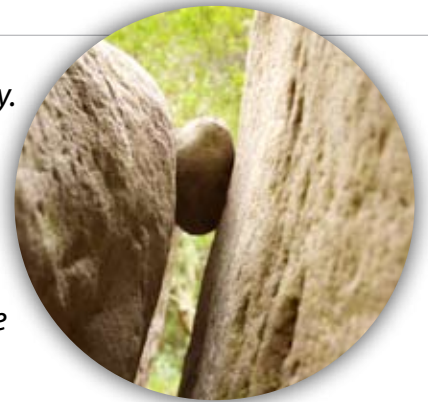
Participant's Guide

Participant's Guide

Between Despair and Hope

Our pain is real, but so is God's presence.

This is the final study in our series on Deuteronomy. We have been in between the wilderness and the Promised Land, waiting and listening. We have discovered the importance of memory for our imagination. In this study, we encounter one of the last invitations for living in transition.



Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:8

Based On: The sermon series "Living in the In-Between," by Shane Hipps, PreachingToday.com



Between Despair and Hope

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Part 1 Identify the Issue

Deuteronomy is an incredibly honest book. In many ways, it reflects our experiences in life. For a lot of us, life doesn't wrap up into a nice, neat bow with a happy ending. This is not like a sitcom where all of life's conflicts and troubles are wrapped up in 30 minutes. No, Deuteronomy presents us with the harsh realities of life and of living in between.

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Deuteronomy is painfully realistic.

Teaching Point Two: God promises his presence in the midst of our pain.

Teaching Point Three: We should anticipate God's presence.

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Action Point: Set aside at least an hour this week to go into your "closet." Take time to read a passage of Scripture and to just sit quietly and meditate on the presence of God.

—Study by Shane Hipps, with JoHannah Reardon

