

Date : 19 November 2023
Theme : Preparation for the next level forward (30th Anniversary and beyond)
Topic : What does the next level entail?
Key passage : Deuteronomy 10:12 to 11:32
Key verse : *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you.....for your good?*
(Deuteronomy 10:12a,13b NKJV)

Introduction

BC had an exhilarating time last Sunday celebrating 30 years of God's goodness at our 30th Anniversary. As much as we delight to linger in the success of the past, we can exercise foresight so as to look ahead with our imagination and ask ...*what do I like the next 2-3 decades to look like?*

Fortunately, we do not need to take a leap into the dark. God is our LORD. He has delineated the scenario ahead and the measure of our success 20-30 years down the road.

- 1) What secures our future? *Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 11:1-17*
- 2) How do we value the next generation now? *Deuteronomy 11:18-21*
- 3) What decision (choices) will stand the test of time? *Deuteronomy 11:26-32*

1) What secures our future? (Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Deuteronomy 11:1-17)

- a) When we circumcise our hearts
(Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. Deuteronomy 10:16)
 - Set apart our hearts to walk in harmony with God's ways.
 - A spiritual commitment and a transformation from stubbornness to obedience.
 - The Lord chooses His Own
(The Lord delighted only...chose...Deuteronomy 10:15a)
 - Although the Lord needs nothing or no one, He sets His affection on us and loves us.
 - What a privilege to know that the God of the Universe chooses to set His affection on us!
We must reciprocate by loving God wholeheartedly.
 - Because of God's love, He wants our hearts to respond in service and mercy.
 - Obedience is not a sacrifice; it is for our good. Disobedience is damaging.
 - When we are set apart
(...above all peoples... Deuteronomy 10:15b)
 - We are blessed to bless others.
- b) When we fear the Lord
(...shall fear the Lord your God; ...hold fast, and take oaths in His name. Deuteronomy 10:20-22)
 - No other god (no other loyalty)
 - "hold fast" – to cling on, emotional closeness, loyalty (as a wife loves her husband).
 - "take oath in His name" – implies binding in a covenant.
 - One of the greatest tragedies we face today is casual Christianity – We love God, but we do not fear Him.
 - Fearing God does not mean being afraid of God, but rather holding a reverent awe of God's holiness and having a submissive attitude towards His will.
 - The Lord is the Owner of All
(...belong to the Lord your God... Deuteronomy 10:14)
 - God is the owner of heaven and earth and everything on earth. He holds dominion over all things and is unparalleled in power and sovereignty.
 - We should have complete reverence and fear towards God because He is in total control.
 - The Lord is worthy of our Praise
(He is your Praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things... Deuteronomy 10:21-22)
 - His awesome deeds, on our behalf, will be worthy of our praise.

- c) When we remember the past to help us VISUALISE ahead.
- i) Keeping alive the memory of our past (*Deuteronomy 11:2-7*)
 - The video at our 30th Anniversary stretches our past way back to George Muller (1805-1898). BC traces her roots to Muller's branch of Open Brethren.
 - Scenarios in the past help us imagine possible futures. (E.g. Philip Robinson's first baptism in 1867, with 9 candidates. This is BC's yardstick to surpass this number at every baptism.)
 - ii) VISUALISE the opportunities ahead (The future is a verb, not a noun) (*Deuteronomy 11:8-17*)
 - Having Spiritual Strength
(*...that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land... Deuteronomy 11:8*)
 - A disciple's spiritual strength is related to his degree of obedience.
 - The next level requires strength to take over (determined warfare). A new level, a new normal for the next decade. We cannot have a different future without a fight.
 - Having to live in a Prosperous Land
(*...a land flowing with milk and honey... Deuteronomy 11:9*)
(*...cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys... Deuteronomy 11:11*)
 - Unlike Egypt's flat and well-irrigated land, Canaan is described as having hills and valleys.
 - The next level requires us to learn new skills, sharpening weapons, and productive work. The prosperous land will have new opportunities but requires labour, not laziness.
 - Having God's attention
(*...which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it... Deuteronomy 11:12*)
(*...then I will give you the rain for your land in its season... Deuteronomy 11:14*)
 - This land is under the care of the Lord, and His eyes are always upon it throughout the year.
 - The next level requires God's wisdom and careful attention to God's Word. It is not like Egypt. It is a land the Lord our God cares for; this needs a close and obedient relationship with God to succeed.

2) How do we show that we value the next generation now? (Deuteronomy 11:18-21)

The problem we have with thinking in the future tense is that the future seems so far away that we focus on short-term goals (e.g., children passing exams). We tend to minimise the possible outcomes because the further away it is, the less important it is to us.

- a) Is the outcome of the future generation part of our decision-making now? (like how we run our homes)?
 - Parents are children's primary spiritual guides. It is no one else's responsibility.
 - Establish a routine of family devotions when you read and discuss passages from the Bible together. Create an environment where family members can ask questions and share insights, fostering spiritual growth within the household.
- b) What is a priority for God's people as we wake up in the morning and as we lie down to sleep?
 - If conversations about God are limited to Sundays, it might reflect that your relationship with God is limited to Sundays.
 - God must be the centre of our homes and the centre of our conversations.
 - Show the children that we don't just talk about God (a religion) but get to talk with God (a relationship).
 - Pray with them at every possible location and situation – in the car, before they go to school, at night before bed, when they are having anxiety, pain, or difficult times.
- c) What visuals do our children see in our homes? (door posts and gates Deuteronomy 11:18-20)
 - The world has so many ideas and influences coming at them constantly. We need to remind them about God's standards and truth continually.
 - Some Israelites took Moses' words literally and made phylacteries (Scripture portions) which they wore on their hands and foreheads (Matt 23:5). God's commands were to be wrapped up in their daily activities (hand) and always in the forefront of their thinking (forehead).

- Doing scripture memory with the children because regularly meditating on verses deepens our understanding.

3) What decisions (choices) will stand the test of time? (Deuteronomy 11:26-32)

God gives warnings of curses and invitations to blessings. God is straightforward. He does not hide the curses of disobedience in an attempt to attract more people. God cares about people. He does not hide consequences; He makes these consequences clear.

- The decision of obedience to shape the future.
 - The commandments reflect a way of life, the good life which God has determined for His people.
 - God wants us to choose and to know what is entailed with each choice.

The choice between the way of blessing and the way of curse was important enough for Moses to name visible reminders for generation after generation to see.

 - Mount Gerizim – the blessings
 - Mount Ebal – the curses
 - Choosing God (blessings) means
 - Circumcise our hearts (repentant, choose God’s way)
 - Stop following our desires (stiff-necked)
 - Obey all God’s commands.
- The decision to start a chain of spiritual generations.
- The decision to belong to the group/environment that chooses obedience to God.

(...be sure that you obey all the decrees and laws I am setting before you today... Deuteronomy 11:32)

BC Membership Covenant

Having taken the step of faith to accept Jesus as my Lord and Saviour, and having been baptised, and being in agreement with the vision and strategy of Bethesda Community, I now covenant before God and my BC family to do the following.

- I will protect the unity of my Church
 - by submitting to the leaders for my accountability. *Hebrews 13:17*
 - by acting in love towards other members (*not gossiping*) for the harmony of my church family. *1 Peter 1:22*
 - by living my everyday life worthy of the gospel. *Philippians 1:27*
- I will participate in the responsibility of my Church
 - by obeying the Great Commandment and Great Commission. (*as the measure of success*)
 - by reaching out through personal and small group evangelism.
 - by asking God for spiritual generations. *Isaiah 58:12*
- I will play my part in the building of my Church
 - by attending, giving regularly and exercising my gifts. *1 Peter 4:10*
 - by being equipped to serve with my leaders. *Ephesians 4:11, 12*
 - by praying for its numerical growth and multiplication. *Acts 6:7*

Name and Sign

Date