

Well, good morning; how are we? Good, good. I want to give a quick shout-out to those joining us in our online community. We're grateful you're part of the Foothills family, worshiping with us wherever you are. If we haven't met, my name is Doug. I'm one of the pastors here. This morning we're continuing our series through Deuteronomy. So, if you would, go ahead and grab your Bibles and turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 12.

You know, one of the things that's easy to miss about following God is how quickly something that's meant to shape our lives ends up actually getting shaped by us instead.

Not intentionally. Not in some obvious, rebellious way. It's just subtle. Over time, we start to build rhythms that work for us.

For example, Sunday mornings. Not in a bad way—we just fit it into the weekend where it works. If we're in town, if we're not too tired, if nothing else is going on, then we're here. And when we are here, we engage to the level that feels natural—some weeks more, some weeks less. Again, nothing about that feels rebellious. It just feels normal. But over time, what's actually happening is that worship is being shaped around our schedule and our preferences instead of our lives being shaped around worship.

Or even during the week—how we relate to God day to day. Most of us don't wake up thinking, "how has God called me to order my life today?" We think about what's in front of us, what needs to get done, what we have time for. And somewhere in there, we try to include God—maybe a quick prayer, maybe some Scripture if there's time. And again, it's not that

God is absent, it's just that He's being worked into a life that's already been structured around everything else.

And the tricky part is, nothing about that feels wrong on the surface. We still believe, we still show up, we still think of ourselves as people who follow God. But underneath it, something starts to shift—because instead of being formed by God, we slowly begin forming a version of faith that fits us.

And that's the moment Deuteronomy 12 steps into. Moses is speaking to a generation that's about to step into the Promised Land, a land filled with established cultures, practices, and ways of worshiping other gods. And before they go in, God makes something very clear: you are not going to relate to Me the way the nations around you do. You're not going to figure this out as you go, and you're not going to build your own version of what worship looks like. I'm going to define it for you. Because what's at stake is not just how you worship—it's who you become.

Check out Deuteronomy chapter 12, verses 1 thru 4. "These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. ²You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. ³You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. ⁴You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way."

That's strong language, isn't it? I mean...destroy, tear down, burn, chop down, remove their names completely. God doesn't come to His people and say, "Hey, just be careful not to get caught up in what they're doing." He doesn't say, "Take what's good and leave what's bad." There's no

sense of blending or adapting here. He's not inviting them to slowly ease into a different way of life. He's commanding a clean break.

Everything associated with the worship of these other gods is to be removed, not managed, not repurposed, not tolerated at a distance. And part of the reason this matters is because worship in the ancient world was not just private spirituality. These high places, altars, pillars, and Asherah poles were tied to whole systems of life, like fertility, and security, and prosperity, or harvest, family, future. So when God tells Israel to tear them down, He's not just telling them to remove religious decorations from the landscape. He's calling them to reject an entire way of looking for life apart from Him.

And then verse 4 lands with even more weight, "you shall not worship the Lord your God in that way." In other words, don't just reject their gods, don't take their methods, their patterns, their ways of approaching the divine, and try to redirect them toward Me. There is something about those forms of worship themselves that are fundamentally incompatible with who God is.

And that's where we start to see what God is really doing here, because this isn't just about eliminating bad behavior. This isn't just about avoiding obvious idolatry. God is protecting His people from something deeper, something more subtle. He's protecting them from being shaped by a way of worship that would slowly, over time, begin to redefine Him and reshape them. Because in Scripture, worship is never just something you do on the surface. It's not just a moment, it's not just an act, it's not just a ritual. Worship is formative.

The way you approach God, the patterns you build into your life, the things you center your attention on and organize your time around—they don't just express what you believe about God, they begin to shape what you believe about Him. And more than that, they begin to shape who you are. So when God commands His people to tear all of this down, He's not being harsh or overbearing, He's being intentional. He knows that if they

adopt the worship practices of the nations around them, even if they try to attach His name to those practices, they will not remain distinct. Over time, they will become indistinguishable from the world around them, because worship always shapes identity.

So, since that worship is formative and is actually shaping who we become, then the question we have to ask is...what is worship? Because in our context, when we hear that word, most of us immediately think about music. We think about what we just did a few minutes ago... singing, raising hands, maybe how we felt during a song. And that is part of worship, it absolutely is, but in Scripture, worship is much bigger than that. Worship isn't just something you do in a moment, it's how you orient your entire life around God. It's what you give your attention to, what you build your life around, what you trust, what you obey, what you bring before Him. It includes gathering, sacrifice, obedience, giving, rejoicing—it's the whole of life being ordered around the reality that God is at the center, like we talked about a few weeks ago in Deuteronomy 6.

And that's exactly what God is doing in this passage. He's not just telling them what not to do, He's about to show them what true worship actually looks like. Because once all the false worship is torn down, something has to take its place. And God doesn't leave that up to them to figure out. He doesn't say, "Alright, now just go do what feels right." He defines it for them.

Check out verse 5 with me. "But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there. There you shall go."

Everything shifts right here. Instead of worship happening everywhere, in whatever way feels right, God says there will be a place. And scholars often point out that this is one of the major emphases in Deuteronomy 12: Israel is moving from scattered local worship sites to a worship life centered around the place God chooses. That matters because God is not only regulating a ritual; He is forming a people around His presence.

A place I choose. A place where My name dwells. A place where My people come together. And then He continues by saying that this is where your offerings go, your sacrifices, your tithes, your contributions... this is where you bring your whole life before Me. In other words, worship is no longer scattered. It's centered.

Now for Israel, that meant a literal place. At this point in the story, they don't know exactly where that place is going to be yet, but they know this...God is going to choose it. Eventually, that place becomes Jerusalem. It becomes the temple. It becomes the place where God's presence dwells among His people, where sacrifices are offered, where the people gather, where their lives are ordered around Him. Everything centers there.

And that matters, because what God is doing is protecting unity and identity. If worship is scattered across hills and trees and personal preference, then over time, everyone begins to do what feels right to themselves. And when that happens, you don't just lose consistency—you lose clarity about who God is. You lose a shared understanding of what it means to belong to Him. You lose your identity as a distinct people. When worship is centered—when God defines the place and the pattern—what begins to happen is that His people are no longer forming themselves individually, they're being formed together around Him. They begin to share a common focus, a shared understanding of who God is, and a way of life that reflects that.

But at this point, we have to be careful, because we don't live under the Old Covenant. We're not being told to go find a physical location where God's name dwells and only worship there, so something has clearly changed, and if we don't understand what changed, we'll either ignore this passage altogether or we'll misapply it.

What changed is that the "place" where God's presence dwells is no longer a location, it's no longer in Jerusalem at the temple. Now, it's a person.

In John chapter 2, Jesus stands in the temple and says something that completely reframes everything. He says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," and the people listening are super confused because they're thinking about the building, but Jesus isn't. He's talking about Himself. Jesus becomes the true temple, the place where God's presence dwells fully, the place where people come to meet with God, the center around which everything now revolves.

And it doesn't stop there, because after His resurrection, when He sends His Spirit, the New Testament tells us that now the people of God—the church—become the dwelling place of God. Not a building, not a single location, but a gathered people whose lives are centered on Jesus. So when we read Deuteronomy 12, we're not being told to go to one geographic place, we're being shown something deeper, that God has always been concerned with shaping His people by centering their worship on where His presence is. It's important for us to understand that God forms a people, not just individuals.

And now, for us, that center is Jesus, and the primary way that shows up in our lives is through the gathered church, which means that worship was never meant to be scattered across whatever works for us, it's still meant to be centered on Him.

So, because of that, because worship is still meant to be centered on Jesus, and if the primary way that shows up is through the gathered people of God—then I think it raises a really honest question for us...a clarifying question...what has our worship actually been centered on? I think this is really important. What has our worship actually been centered on?

Because if we're honest, it doesn't take much for our faith to become scattered again. Not intentionally, not because we've rejected God, but because we've slowly drifted into structuring our lives around everything else and then fitting God into whatever space is left. And over time, what

happens is that our faith becomes more individual than communal, more reactive than intentional, more shaped by what we feel or what's convenient than by what God has revealed. And when that happens, we don't stop believing—we just stop being formed in the way God has designed.

So let me give you one really simple place to start, and it's not complicated, but it is intentional. I want to invite those who need to, to re-center your life around gathered worship. Not just attending when it works, but actually treating it like something that shapes you. Showing up ready, engaged, expectant, not because you have to, but because this is one of the primary ways God forms His people. This is where we hear His Word together, where we sing truth together, where we're reminded of who He is together. And when this becomes optional or occasional, we don't just lose a habit—we lose a central piece of how God forms us.

And I would just say, this is also why things like our community groups and our Bible studies matter so much. They are not just programs on a church calendar. At their best, they are places where we keep being formed together, where we open Scripture, pray with each other, encourage each other, and remember that following Jesus was never meant to be something we do alone. And so if you're wanting to connect in that way, please let us know. You can email me, you can put it on a connect card and turn it in. We'd love to make that happen for you.

You know another thing we can do is to begin to pay attention to what is actually shaping our lives day to day. Like, what's actually setting our rhythms? What captures our attention, what drives our decisions, what do we turn to when things get hard. Because whatever sits at the center of our lives is already forming us. And if it's not Jesus, then something else is quietly taking that place, even if you still believe all the right things. For some of us, it's just the pace of life. From the moment we wake up, we're moving. Work, kids, responsibilities, schedules, emails, practices, everything just keeps going. And before we know it, our entire day has been shaped by what needed to get done, and God was something we

tried to squeeze in somewhere along the way. Not rejected, not ignored...just not central. And over time, that pace starts to form us. It trains us to live reactive instead of rooted.

For others, it's what we turn to when things get hard. When we're stressed, or discouraged, or overwhelmed, where do we actually go? Is it distraction, scrolling, entertainment, trying to shut it off for a while? Is it control, trying to fix everything ourselves? Again, nothing about that feels extreme. It just feels normal. But whatever we run to in those moments is revealing what's really sitting at the center, and it's shaping us more than we realize.

And if you keep reading through this passage, you start to see something else that's really important. This centered worship that God is establishing, it's not just structured, it's not just intentional, it's actually meant to be joyful and something that is shared. In verse 7, He says, "And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households." And again in verse 12, "You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters..."

In other words, this isn't just about getting worship right—it's about being formed into a people who actually enjoy God together. Families, households, the whole community gathered in His presence, not just going through the motions, but rejoicing in who He is and what He has done.

And that's important, because sometimes when we hear all of this, all the structure, the commands, tearing things down, centering our worship, it can start to feel constricting. But what God is building here is not cold, and it's not rigid. It's a shared life with Him that is meant to be full of joy. And really, isn't that where we all want to be?! A life full of joy and closeness, a shared life of freedom and grace?!

And I think this is where it all comes down to something really simple, but really honest. Not just, "Do I believe the right things about God?" But, "what is my life actually being formed around?"

Because something is already shaping our lives. Every day, every rhythm, every decision, every place we run to when life gets hard—it's all forming us into something. And Deuteronomy 12 is reminding us that God doesn't leave that to chance. He steps in and says, "If you want to be My people, then your life has to be centered on Me."

Not partially. Not when it fits. Not just in moments. But in a way that actually shapes everything else. And He's not saying that we need to add more to our lives. It's not to try harder or do more. It's to re-center. To let our lives be shaped by Jesus instead of trying to fit Him into everything else. To let worship move from something occasional to something that actually forms us. And to step back into what God has always intended for His people, not just as individuals trying to follow Him on our own, but as a people, gathered around Him, being shaped together.

Because when that happens, we don't just get better habits, we begin to experience a life that is actually anchored, actually clear, and actually full in a way that scattered worship never produces.

Let's pray.