

Life Lessons from Desert Wandering – Worship

05/25/25

In 1968, Congress changed the observance of Decoration Day to the last Monday in May. It was celebrated on May 30th each year. In 1971, Congress changed Decoration Day to Memorial Day. Decoration Day started around 1868 in remembrance of those who fought in the Civil War. It took Congress hundred years to change the day and name – sounds about right for them. It's an important day where we remember those who have given their lives for America and for what it stands for. This is an important day and we should always celebrate it. It's a humbling sight to see all the American flags at the cemeteries flying at each marker or tombstone of past veterans. We revere and honor all our past military personal who have kept us safe and free. It is a good time to reflect and to be thankful. There is no other Country I would want to live at, but here. Some like to watch old war movies during the Memorial weekend to get them into the mood. Most plan on eating some type of American meal – hamburgers and hot dogs. Most people make some type of plans because it's an important holiday for us. However, we should spend time as well thinking about how we worship each week. Maybe we don't take worshipping God with enough seriousness. In fact, maybe the American Church has lost the ability to worship correctly. We now use worship as a merchandising tool to bring people in. We do worship now to please people. God had to teach Israel in the Old Testament how to worship. We have much to learn, but we can look upon the Old Testament worship as a guide for today.

So, let's turn to Deuteronomy 26: 1 – 11, "When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there. ³And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come

into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.⁵ “And you shall make response before the LORD your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.’⁶ And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor.⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.⁸ And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror,^[a] with signs and wonders.⁹ And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.¹⁰ And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God.¹¹ And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you. (ESV – Biblegateway.com)

Here we have God helping Israel to learn how to worship. The Hebrew term used in verse 10 for worship means to bow down, reverence (Strong’s Concordance). So, since Israel is an agricultural nation, God has them worship Him with their firstfruits of all they produce from the soil. Another term that can be used for “firstfruit” is beginning. In other words, the best and not the last. When sweet corn comes in, the first local corn is usually the best. The last pickin’s is usually has tougher kernels and looks rougher. So, the first and best crops were to be brought to the priest. Then the people were to state a prayer involving retelling the story on how they were able to come to the promise land. A big part of worship is remembering what God has done for us. The people were to say this prayer to force them to remember what God had done in their life. Plus, they gave the firstfruits of their crops because of the love they were to have for God. This goes back to the Great Command God gave Israel in Deuteronomy 6: 5, “And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly, to these commands I am giving you today. (NLT)” God didn’t ask for leftover crops. God asked for the best crops. God told Israel He would be with them if they obeyed and follow Him in love. In fact, God tells them that in the verse above the Great Command we

just read. God tells them all will go well for them in verse 3. This was a faith builder. Many Christians today tithe what is left over at the end of the week. If you follow what we just read, we tithe before we pay bills or anything else. Giving back to God should our top goal out of love. God will help us just like He told Israel He would if we only give God our firstfruits in worship. Whatever you put in the offering plate is your firstfruits for God. That makes tithing more personal, doesn't it? It truly is a form of worship and we should take it seriously. And then we remember and praise God for what He has done in the past.

Moses continues in Deuteronomy 26: 12 – 19, ¹² “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled,¹³ then you shall say before the LORD your God, ‘I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them. ¹⁴ I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me. ¹⁵ Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.’¹⁶ “This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹⁷ You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. ¹⁸ And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, ¹⁹ and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.” (ESV – Biblegateway.com)

Again, we read how Israel is to remember what the Lord has done for them in the past. We should do this every Sunday when we worship the Lord. Remember

all the ways the Lord has helped us. So, God again gives them an example of prayer to be said. Also, in verse 16, we see God reminding them about observe the decrees and laws from God with all their heart and with all their soul. This goes back to the Great Command again. All of this is done out of love. Plus, God let's them know in verse 12, that they are to give to the Levite's, the foreigners, the fatherless, and the widows after they have given a tenth to God. In other words, giving to others is a part of worshipping God in love. Many will say this is too much. God is asking too much here. God reminds them again in verse 15 that He will bless them. Again, this is a faith issue. God will supply our needs when we put Him first in our worship and with our firstfruits. Plus, we are to give to those in need as a sign of worship. Here is a good example of this.

Richard Wurmbrand was born in 1909 in Romania. When he got older, he went to Moscow to study Marxism. He became a Romanian Communist leader in his country. In 1936, Richard married Sabina Oster. In the town they were staying in, Richard and Sabina met a Romanian carpenter who witnessed to them about Jesus Christ. Both allowed Jesus into their hearts and they became racially changed. Richard went back to school and was ordained twice. After WWII, Richard became an Evangelical Lutheran priest. In 1944, Romania was taken over by Russia and became a communist regime. Richard, since he was a born-again believer, went everywhere preaching Jesus even to the Red Army. He stood up at a great council for the churches while he was a professor in the only Lutheran seminary in Romania. Richard stood up and denounced government control of the churches in Romania. You see, communism teaches a doctrine of state atheism. The same teaching that Richard believed in before he met Jesus. Richard was arrested on February 29, 1948 because of preaching to people about Jesus Christ. He passed from one jail to another until Jilava where he was held in solitary confinement for three years. The cell he was in was twelve feet underground with no lights, no windows, and no sound. The guards wore felt cloth on the bottom of their shoes so the prisoners could be tortured by total silence. To keep his sanity, he would try to remember when it would be daytime and nighttime. He would try to sleep during the day and at night, he would compose a sermon and deliver it each night. This helped to keep his mind sharp and his faith strong. During this time, he was able to communicate with other inmates by tapping morse code against the walls of his underground cell. Richard spent over eight years in prison and then was let go. He was caught preaching

again and he was sent back to prison with a 25-year sentence. Now, he had to face physical torture. He was burned, beaten, dealt with broken bones, was put in large frozen ice boxes for long periods of time and the list goes on and on. The communists wanted Richard to release to them the names of other Christians that he knew. He would not buckle under the pressure. One of the methods of torture was beating the soles of the feet until the flesh came off. Then the communists would wait a day or two and do it again until the meat on the bottom of the feet were gone – to bare bone. Richard's wife would spend time in a prison as well. Richard was finally released in 1964. The underground church in Romania helped him and his wife to leave Romania. Richard died in 2001 in America. In his memoir titled *Tortured for Christ*, he talks about tithing in prison. I believe it was during his second imprisonment. He states this, "When we were given one slice of bread a week and dirty soup every day, we decided we would faithfully tithe even that. Every tenth week, we took the slice of bread and gave it to the weaker brethren as our tithe to the Master."

Richard followed God's instructions on worship with tithe. He wanted to tithe out of love for Jesus and then to use that worship to give to those around him. Worship is all about love. We can't treat worship and tithing as an empty ritual or treat it like a Pharisee law. Giving to God is done in the act of love. Plus, we have to remember verse 19, "¹⁹and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised." Worshipping and tithing to our Lord must be done in a holy manner. We are His holy people. Our Lord has given us so much, why do so many hold back? It's a love issue with God. It needs to be dealt with and that can be done through prayer. Ask the Lord to help you to worship and to tithe to Him in a holy manner through the love of Christ. You'll enjoy worship so much more. Richard Wurmbrand was able to enjoy worship even in a communist prison with only bread to use as tithe. He did it out of love for Jesus and for his fellow men in that prison with him. He set a good example for us to follow.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton, 1996.

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001

Richard Wurmbrand info - Wikipedia