

**Deuteronomy 30:11-20**

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

**Deuteronomy 31:1-2**

When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them: 'I am now a hundred and twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about, and the Lord has told me, "You shall not cross over this Jordan."'

**Romans 5:1-5**

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

**No Left Turns**  
**Rev. David Dalke**  
**November 22, 2007**

There was a gentleman whose name was Ernest Shackleton, in fact it was Sir Ernest Shackleton. He was an explorer, led expeditions to the South Pole in the early 1900s, and he put out an ad in a newspaper before he got ready to go on one of his expeditions and it said, "Needed: People for a hazardous journey. Small wages, many many weeks of darkness, extreme danger, little food, return not guaranteed. But in case of success, you will be honored." Will Rogers said, "The reason I look the way I do is because I have traveled over many, many roads, and most of them have not been paved." And I suspect this morning we have a group of people in this congregation, holding flowers, that have

been on many expeditions and are here to be honored because they survived them, and have traveled many, many roads, and many of them, I'm sure, were not paved. And because of that, I suspect you folks have a great deal to teach the rest of us. I think you have much to teach us, and one of the things that I would suggest is that you teach us that we are never too old to learn something new. We are never too old to learn something new. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old, according to Scripture. That tells me that back then he really worked out well and ate well, because that's a hundred and twenty years old. He looked at the people in Israel and he said, "I have a new commandment for you. It's a new one. I've given you commandments, but this one is new." And he said, "It isn't that difficult. In fact, it's not even a commandment from Heaven, and it's not one from across the sea. It's a commandment," he said, "that's found right in here, in your soul." And he said, "I'm going to summarize the commandment for you, and it goes like this: Choose life. Choose life, with all its perplexities, all of its mystery, all of its wonderment, choose life." And then he said, "I want you to model it. I want you to tell your children, and I want you to tell your grandchildren, and your great-grandchildren to choose life. Be a model," he said to these people in Israel.

One of the things I think is, I'm not sure he knew much about genetics. I suspect that when Moses got his physical from his family physician, I doubt if they really asked him, "Tell us about your family history, Moses." And if they'd asked it, it would have been pretty brief. "Well, I'm not sure who my mother was, and they put me in a basket and floated me down the Nile River, and somebody, a pharaoh's daughter, plucked me out of that and raised me, and that's about it." I'm not sure he knew much about genetics, and it really does play a part in what we pass down. When I was in high school I was terrible at math, I mean awful, and every day after school my buddy John Selfridge would walk into my house with me and we would open my mathematics book and John would help me with my assignments, because I was so bad. John was really smart. He went on to teach architecture at Yale. He was smart and I did not understand it. And one day, years later, my youngest daughter Marybeth and I were walking down the street, Marybeth was a freshman in college, and we saw John, and he said, "So you're Marybeth." She says, "Yeah." He says, "What's going on for you?" She said, "I'm a freshman in school now, in college." He said, "Really? Are you in any math classes?" She said, "Yeah, I'm in one." "Really," he said, "you're in a math class?" She said, "Yeah, I had to, it's required." He said, "Do you like it?" and she said, "No." "Are you any good at it?" "I'm terrible." "Do you study hard?" "I just don't understand it at all." He looked at her and he said, "Marybeth, when you enrolled in that class, what you really needed to have done was to have applied for a genetic waiver."

I don't think Moses knew much about that, but he knew a lot about your heart, and he knew a lot about your soul, and he said, "Choose life." Because we're never, he said, we're never, ever too old to learn something new. Dad was a really successful music teacher, in concert, in marching, in sight-reading as he directed his bands. He was wonderful at it. And then he went into the insurance industry and he did a good job, and he felt like he gave people a gift when he went out to see them with insurance. And then he retired. After he'd been retired for quite some time, I got a telephone call. He was in his seventies then. The call came in and he said, "Dave, Mom and I need to come and talk

to you.” And I said, “Sure.” He said, “It’s a business meeting.” They came and sat down, and immediately after he sat down, tears flew out of him, and he got into this little Mennonite German brogue, and he said, “I don’t know what to do with my life. I can’t figure it out any more. Once I knew who I was. I don’t know who I am any more. And you can only play so much golf.” And we talked and cried, and finally he decided to go back to school. He was seventy-two years old. “I’ll go back to school. I’ll finish my Master’s in Music Education. I started it, I’ll go back and finish it.” So he went to the University of Kansas and walked into registrar’s office and said, “Hi, I’m Jake Dalke. I’ve come back and I’m going to finish my Master’s in Music Education.” They said, “Well, Mr. Dalke, when did you start that?” He said, “1939.” They said, “Just a moment,” and they went and you could see all the registrar people hovered over a computer and a microfilm and they were looking and searching, and pretty soon the registrar came out and said, “Mr. Dalke, we found your transcript, and we’re going to honor all your credits. Welcome back. ” Welcome back, because you are never too old to learn something new. We’re never too old to learn something new, and you folks out there teach us that. You teach us that by who you are. You also teach us something else. You teach us that life is precious, and that we are vulnerable people, and that life can also be very fragile, with lots of expeditions, and that we should never take it for granted. We should not take one moment for granted.

I was in the barber shop the other day, and I was seated over there getting my hair cut, and in the door walked an older man, he looked pretty old to me, and the barber leaned up to me and said, “He’s ninety-eight years old.” He kind of shuffled in, and he was limping, and one of the barbers said, “Well, hi, Henry. What are you limping for?” He said, “Well, I was playing softball last night and I slid into second base and I tore up my knee.” Because we’re so vulnerable at any age, it doesn’t matter, we’re all so vulnerable and fragile in many ways. That became so real to me this summer as I stood at the site of a destroyed government building in Oklahoma City, the Alfred P. Murrah government building that was destroyed April the 19<sup>th</sup> in 1995, and 168 people lost their lives, and 19 of them were children, and 700 people were injured. As I walked into the memorial, the first part of the memorial is a big gate, some of you may have been there, and the gate says numbers on it, engraved, and the numbers are 9:01, the time when all was peaceful, the time when people were in that building going about their business, talking on their phones, going to their meetings, getting their cups of coffee, shuffling their papers. Children were in their daycare on the second floor. And I walked through the gate, and there’s this pool of water, it’s an elongated pool of water like a rectangle, it’s only about six inches deep. It’s called the reflection pool. 9:02, two minutes past nine, when the horrific explosion occurred. And on down at the end of the pool, there’s another gate, and it has on it the numbers 9:03, the time of chaos and disbelief. As I stood there with my family and we were looking into the water, and I was just thinking how fragile life can be, and in the blink of an eye something can happen that changes. My eyes drifted across into a little bit of a hill where the building actually had stood, because we were where the street was, and there were nine rows of chairs, representing each floor of the building, and in each of those rows were the people who worked there and played there. The larger chairs with names were for the adults and the smaller chairs were for the children. And my eyes drifted back and I stood there looking in that water. I can’t believe it. Look at

this. It's a destroyed place and now we've built this memorial. Life is so tenuous. We never know. We are healthy and then we have a disease. We are driving and then we have an accident. We have a friend and then they leave us, and then we think we have a marriage and it falls apart, and it's so fragile. Life can be so fragile, and we should never take it for granted, ever. And as I'm looking in the water thinking those thoughts a young girl, she must have been nine or ten, had taken her shoes off, and she was splashing through the water, just running and splashing and frolicking like it was a play place, and I wanted to shout, "Stop! Stop! You are disturbing the sacred." But that's exactly what happens is, when we think things are okay, that somehow all of this is sacred creations, we get disturbed. And you folks out there with flowers have taught us that. You have taught us how fragile life can be.

We had gone there to watch our grandson play baseball in a tournament for ten-year-olds, and as we were starting to exit, I looked around, and there was a survival tree behind me that had withstood the blast, then I started to walk to the left and across the street there was the Methodist church, the downtown Methodist church that was also damaged. In fact it had a stained glass window, for some reason that stained glass window was blown out of that church, and it was all destroyed except for the face of Christ. Just the face of Christ withstood that blast. So we went back to the ball diamond. Cooper's getting ready to play, and I'm standing there talking to a man about my age. He was a grandpa. He was there to watch his grandson play, too. I was talking to him a little bit about that experience, about the sacredness of life and that explosion, and he looked at me and he said, "You know, I'm a retired FBI agent, and I was in my office in Dallas, Texas the day of that explosion." He said, "The minute we saw it on the TV and the minute we heard it on our scanners, we got on a plane and we started immediately for Oklahoma City because we knew we were going to be dealing with organized terrorism, and when we got there we found out that some young man had rented a car and was tearing out of town at breakneck speed and he'd been stopped for speeding, and when they looked at him they saw a weapon on the front seat of his car. And they took him down to jail and they ran a check on him and found out his name was Timothy McVeigh." The man who never confessed or denied his involvement on that April 19 day. Life can be so fragile that we must never take it for granted, and you teach us that. You seniors teach us that, and I believe you also teach us one more thing, that all the wisdom we have, everything we understand about life, comes to us through our experiences. Wisdom comes to us through all of our experiences.

Archibald McLeish when he was alive and he was that author and poet, he said, "Sometimes our experiences can be very painful, but it's much more painful to not learn from them." And Paul said that to those people at Rome, that Maxine read for us. Paul said, he says, "You know, I'm going to give you a statement of faith, and it's this." He said, "You've had lots of experiences, all of you," as he spoke to those people. "You've had lots of experiences, good, bad, significant, wonderful, painful experiences." And he said, "Even in all those and with your suffering, all of those," and these are the words of the Scripture, "they promote endurance and they promote patience, and your endurance and patience promotes character". And character, you know, is the way we think and the way we feel and the way we behave, that's our character, and Paul said all of that is

promoted, all your experiences promote your character, and your character promotes hope. Hope that through it all, we're not alone. Through all our wisdom that we gain about life, we make it somehow.

Michael Gardner thought that. Michael Gardner is the president of NBC News, and he talks about how much wisdom he learned from his parents. He said, "You know, I never saw my dad drive a car." He said, "I understood in 1927 they said he drove one. They said he drove an old Whipple." I never heard of that. Some of you may, but I don't know what a Whipple is. He said, "Dad drove that until he said to my Mom one day, he said, 'You know, I don't want to drive any more, because you have to keep your hands so busy, and you've got to keep your feet so busy, and you've got to look both ways and up and down, you miss too much. So I'm not going to drive any more. I'm going to walk, so I don't miss anything.'" To which Michael Gardner's mother said, "Well, that's probably not the real reason he quit driving. The real reason he quit driving is because he hit a horse." To which his dad said, "Well, that too." They didn't have a car. They were the only ones in the neighborhood that never had a car until 1952 when Michael's older brother David turned 16 and they decided to get him a car. Thought, "We ought to have a car." So they bought him an old 1952 Chevy. And it wasn't long after that that Michael's mom said, "You know what? We need more than one driver in this family." So she went out and found someone to teach her to drive. They went and learned in the cemetery, because Michael's dad said, "Who can you hurt in the cemetery?" So they drove, for years and years she did. Michael's dad was the navigator. He sat in the front seat on the right side, and she drove. And he said, "When my dad was 95 and my mom was 88, I was visiting. We went out to go to the grocery store and get some ice cream, and I was in the back seat. Mom was driving, Dad was navigating. We went to the store and Mom got out and went in the store and when she was gone Dad turned around, he looked at me and he said, 'Michael, do you know the secret to long life?'" Michael said, "I was all prepared for this philosophical diatribe, this theological statement." He said, "No, Dad, what is the secret to long life?" And he said, "Well, it's no left turns." "No left turns?" He said, "Just think about it, Michael. Every time you make a left-hand turn, you turn right in the front of oncoming traffic." He said, "That's just silly. Why would you want to do that? And Mom and I decided as we got older and our vision failed a little bit and our senses weren't quite right at times and our judgment wasn't good, we decided we would never make another left-hand turn. So what we do is, we make three right turns. Because then you wind up going the same way you would have if you'd turned left." And he said, "You know, sometimes I lose count. And then we make seven right-hand turns." Michael said, "Do you ever go for eleven?" "No, no, we don't do that. We figure if we're into seven, we just go home and call it a bad day."

Michael said, "My dad lived to be 102 years old. I never could quite figure it out, whether he lived to be 102 because he loved to walk so he wouldn't miss anything, or because he quit making left-hand turns." You folks with your flowers today have taught us that all that we know, all of our experience, all of our wisdom, is what gives us life. It's what gives us life. And so today we have drawn on Moses, and we've asked a little bit from Paul, the apostle Paul, and then we've asked some things from you that hold your flowers, to remind us and teach us that we're never too old to learn something new, and

to also teach us that life can be very fragile and we must never take it for granted. And you also teach us that all we know about life, all of our wisdom comes from all of our experiences. And then there's one more you say to us – Be careful, be careful – no left turns. Amen.