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Taking Credit For God's Work

What happens to a rescued people when the wilderness ends and the harvest finally comes in.

DEUTERONOMY 8:17 (LSB) · A STUDY ON PROSPERITY, MEMORY, AND THE TEST NOBODY NOTICES

“lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand made me this wealth.’”

DEUTERONOMY 8:17, LSB

I want to start with a confession, because this lesson caught me before I ever finished writing it. It is easy for me to trust God in a hard season. When the money is short and the door is closed and I have run out of options, prayer comes naturally, because I have nothing else. What I have had to face is how quickly I forget Him the moment things start going well. The good season is where I lose Him, and I never feel it happening. That is exactly the warning Moses gives here, and once I saw it I could not un-see it.

What the passage says

Moses is standing on the plains of Moab. Forty years are over, the generation that refused to enter at Kadesh is buried in the sand behind him, and the people in front of him are about to cross into the land. Read chapter 8 slowly, because it is not a warning about the wilderness they are leaving. It is a warning about the good land they are walking into.

The chapter has a shape, and the shape is the whole argument.

- **Verses 1 through 6.** The wilderness was on purpose. He humbled you, let you go hungry, fed you manna you had never seen, so you would learn that man does not live on bread alone. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell for forty years. He was disciplining you like a father disciplines a son.
- **Verses 7 through 10.** The land is genuinely good, and God does not undersell it. Streams and springs, wheat and barley, vines and fig trees and pomegranates, olive oil and honey. Then verse 10: you will eat and be satisfied, and you will bless Yahweh your God for the good land He gave you.
- **Verse 11.** Here is the hinge. Watch yourself, so you do not forget Yahweh your God.
- **Verses 12 through 17.** The slow slide, and the sentence it ends in.
- **Verse 18.** The correction. Remember Yahweh, because He is the one giving you the power to make wealth, to confirm His covenant.
- **Verses 19 and 20.** What happens if they forget. You will perish like the nations you pushed out.

Look at what that structure does. The hard years get explained as God's training. The good land gets described as God's gift. And the real danger is placed on the far side of the wilderness, in the part of life that looks like the answer to every prayer you prayed in the desert. That is the part I never guard, and I doubt I am the only one.

The slow slide in verses 12 through 14

Slow down here, because Moses builds this one step at a time, and you have to feel the steps.

You eat and you are satisfied. You build a nice house and settle into it. Your herds grow. Your savings grow. Everything you have multiplies. Then your heart is lifted up and you forget Yahweh your God who brought you out of the house of slavery.

Now go back and try to find the sin in that chain. There is not one. Eating is not a sin. Building a house is not a sin. Your business growing is not a sin, and all through Deuteronomy that kind of increase is called a blessing. Not one link in the chain is something you would ever kneel down and repent of.

That is what makes this so dangerous. The problem is not any single step. It is the pile of them, and what the pile quietly does to your heart over years. There is no bad moment to catch, which is exactly why nobody catches it.

The sentence a full heart says

Verse 17 is the whole disease in one line, and I want you to notice what it is not. It is not “there is no God.” Nobody here becomes an atheist. It is not even “I do not need God,” said out loud. It is a quieter thing than that. It is a rewritten story about where the good things came from. My power. The might of my hand. Made me all of this.

Look at the words “say in your heart.” Moses is not talking about a speech. He is talking about a private accounting you may never say to anyone, that you might not even know you believe, but that has become the real explanation you carry for your own life. That is the version I am most afraid of, the one I would deny if you asked me and still live by on a Tuesday.

Verse 18 does not fix it by shaming the wealth. It fixes it by correcting who gets the credit: remember Yahweh, because He is the one giving you the power to make wealth. And the verb is present tense. Not He who gave you one lucky break a long time ago, but He who is, right now, handing you the very ability you have been crediting to yourself.

Paul says the same thing in one sentence in 1 Corinthians 4:7: what do you have that you did not receive, and if you received it, why do you brag as if you did not? Same disease, same cure, fifteen hundred years apart. The problem was never the having. It was the “as if you did not receive it.”

One caution about verse 18. You will hear this verse quoted as a promise that God wants to make you rich. Read it to the end before you believe that. The stated purpose of the wealth-making power is “to confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers.” The purpose is His covenant, not your comfort. And the whole verse lives inside a warning, not a promise. Pulling it out of this chapter and preaching it as a guarantee of prosperity turns the chapter completely backwards.

The setup back in chapter 6

Two chapters earlier, in Deuteronomy 6:10-12, Moses names the trigger even more plainly, and this is the verse most of us in a stable season actually need.

He will bring you into great and splendid cities you did not build, houses full of good things you did not fill, cisterns you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. You will eat and be satisfied. Then watch yourself, so you do not forget Yahweh who brought you out of the house of slavery.

DEUTERONOMY 6:10-12, LSB (paraphrased)

Four times in two verses: you did not build it, you did not fill it, you did not dig it, you did not plant it. The specific danger is receiving what you did not earn, and then, after enough years of living in it, telling the story like you did.

Why this is so hard to see

We all have a category for the danger of suffering. Every believer I know has been taught that hard seasons test your faith. Almost nobody has a category for the danger of an answered prayer.

Hardship announces itself. It shows up with a name and a date and it drives you straight to your knees. But abundance shows up looking like God's approval, and that is exactly why you never put your guard up.

And here is the part that makes this genuinely hard and not just easy to miss: in Deuteronomy 8 the prosperity really is from God. He says so. The blessing and the test are the same object. You cannot get out of the tension by pretending the good thing came from somewhere else.

There is also no clean line to watch for. Suffering has a moment you can point to. This has no moment. It is a slope, and the entire warning is that you will not feel yourself sliding down it.

Jesus put His finger on the mechanism. In the parable of the soils, the seed among the thorns gets choked by the worries of this world and the deceitfulness of riches (Mark 4:18-19; Matthew 13:22; Luke 8:14). Deceitfulness is the word to sit with. Riches do not choke the word by fighting it. They choke it by lying to you about what they are, and the soil looks perfectly healthy the whole time.

The record

This is not a hypothetical Moses made up to scare people. Scripture records it happening over and over, and it is almost always the same shape: rise, strength, a heart lifted up, then the fall.

- **The generation after Joshua** (Judges 2:7-13; 3:7). Israel served Yahweh the whole time Joshua and the elders who had seen God work were alive. Then a generation grew up that did not know Yahweh or what He had done, and they forgot Him. One generation of comfortable life did what forty years of wilderness could not.
- **Solomon** (Deuteronomy 17:16-17; 1 Kings 10-11). The law of the king said do not pile up horses, wives, or silver and gold. He did all three. First Kings 10 brags on the wealth, and chapter 11 opens with his heart turning away in his old age.
- **Uzziah** (2 Chronicles 26:15-16). He was helped by God in a marvelous way until he was strong. But when he became strong, his heart grew proud, and it destroyed him. The help and the ruin are in the same sentence, joined by the word “until.”
- **Hezekiah** (2 Chronicles 32:25-31). Riches and honor in great abundance, and a heart that grew proud after all he had received. Notice the timing: it comes after God rescued him from Assyria and healed him. The thing that tripped him was the answered prayer.
- **Nebuchadnezzar** (Daniel 4:29-32). Up on his roof: is this not Babylon the great, which I myself built by the might of my power? That is Deuteronomy 8:17 in a pagan king's mouth, almost word for word, and the words are still in the air when judgment falls.
- **Sodom** (Ezekiel 16:49). The verse that stops the room. Sodom's guilt is listed as arrogance, plenty of food, and careless ease, and she never helped the poor and needy. That is a prosperity diagnosis.
- **The northern kingdom** (Hosea 13:6). They had their pasture and got full. They got full and their heart got proud. So they forgot Me. Deuteronomy 8:12-14 read back as an indictment, in the same order.
- **Zion at ease** (Amos 6:1-6). Ivory beds, the best lambs, wine by the bowl. The charge is not the luxury by itself: they were not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. Comfort had made them numb to somebody else falling apart.
- **Laodicea** (Revelation 3:17). I am rich, I need nothing. And the risen Christ answers that they do not even know they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

One thread runs right on the surface. A heart that is “lifted up” shows up again and again, and in Deuteronomy 8:14 and Hosea 13:6 it is the same Hebrew word, *rum*, to be raised high. The Bible does not treat pride as a quirk that hangs around money. It treats a lifted-up heart as the specific thing abundance grows in you if nothing interrupts it.

The same test in the New Testament

Do not read this as an Old Testament problem that got solved later. Paul says flat out in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 that the wilderness generation was written down as a warning for us, and Hebrews 3:7-4:11 aims Psalm 95 straight at people already in church.

- **The rich fool** (Luke 12:13-21). Count the pronouns: my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul. God is not mentioned once until He interrupts. Nothing the man does is illegal or foolish on paper. The verdict is one word, “Fool,” because he stored up treasure for himself and was not rich toward God.

- **Cannot, not should not** (Matthew 6:19-24). Jesus does not say it is unwise to serve God and money. He says you cannot do it. Verse 21 is the key: where your treasure is, that is where your heart will be. You can find your heart by looking at your bank account.
- **The astonished disciples** (Mark 10:17-27). They had been taught that wealth was proof of God's favor, so Jesus is not just naming an obstacle, He is knocking over a scoreboard. The answer in verse 27 is the Gospel of this whole lesson: with men it is impossible, but not with God.
- **The nine who never came back** (Luke 17:11-19). Ten healed, one comes back to say thank you, and he is the Samaritan. The other nine got exactly what they asked for and kept walking.
- **Paul's one-sentence version** (1 Corinthians 4:7). What do you have that you did not receive? Written to a church with money, gifts, and a high opinion of itself.
- **The business plan** (James 4:13-16). We will go to this city, spend a year, turn a profit. The problem is not planning or profit. It is that they left out "if the Lord wills." Verse 17 written on a calendar.
- **The fading flower** (James 1:9-11). The rich man will fade away in the middle of his pursuits. The reversal is on purpose, and it matches Smyrna and Laodicea exactly.
- **Withheld wages** (James 5:1-6). The pay you held back from the workers is crying out. The Amos and Ezekiel edge landing in the church age.
- **The charge to the rich** (1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19). Verse 17 does not tell rich believers to become poor. It tells them not to be conceited and not to set their hope on money, but on God who richly gives us all things to enjoy, and then to be generous. Enjoyment is not the enemy. Misplaced hope is.
- **Content because He is here** (Hebrews 13:5). Be content with what you have, and the reason is a promise: I will never leave you or forsake you. The cure for wanting more is the presence of a Person. (See our companion study on Psalm 73, The Nearness of God Is My Good.)
- **The Macedonians** (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). In a severe trial, their deep poverty overflowed into rich generosity. Having more does not make you generous. It never did.
- **The church that had everything** (Revelation 3:14-22; 18:7). Laodicea says it needs nothing. Babylon says, I sit as a queen and will never see grief. Same sentence, one at the size of a church and one at the size of an empire.

Here is what I want you to notice about that whole list. Not one of these texts points at a dollar amount. It is always an inside claim: I made this, I need nothing, I will spend a year and turn a profit. The New Testament is as uninterested in your net worth as Deuteronomy was, and just as interested in the sentence you say in your heart about where it all came from.

Before we go further, a word of balance

Do not walk out of this lesson believing that wealth is sin and poverty is holiness. Scripture will not back that up, and the people in your group will feel that something is off.

Abraham was rich in livestock, silver, and gold. Job was the greatest man in the east, and God doubled it at the end. Boaz used real wealth to redeem. Lydia, Joseph of Arimathea, and the women who supported Jesus out of their own means all funded Kingdom work with what they had. And Deuteronomy 8:18 says outright that God gives the power to make wealth. First Timothy 6 never tells the rich to stop being rich.

And hardship is not automatically safe either. The same Israel that failed in the good land had already grumbled through forty years in the desert. Agur put both dangers on one scale in Proverbs 30:8-9: give me neither poverty nor riches, because being full makes me say “Who is Yahweh?” and being desperate makes me steal and shame the name of my God. Two ways to fall, one honest prayer.

So the claim of this lesson is narrow on purpose, and it holds: hardship tests you loudly, and prosperity tests you silently, and the silent test is the one you fail without ever noticing.

What forgetting does to the poor

Chapter 8 is not only about your own heart. It has a social edge. Five times Moses ties a specific memory to a specific command: “remember that you were a slave in Egypt.” Every one is about how you treat someone with less power: Sabbath rest for your servants (5:15), sending a freed servant off with supplies (15:15), making room for the Levite, sojourner, orphan, and widow at your feast (16:12), justice for the sojourner and orphan (24:18), leaving the leftovers in your field (24:22).

That is the engine of the whole social ethic, and it runs on memory. You were the one with nothing once. So act like it.

Which is why forgetting has a body count. Ezekiel 16:49 puts careless ease and neglect of the poor in the same breath. Amos 6:6 says the men on the ivory beds were not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. When you forget your own rescue, the reason to care about somebody else's need goes with it. You do not turn cruel. You just go numb.

The New Testament keeps the same wiring. Ephesians 2:11-12 gives the church its own Egypt formula: remember that you were once separate from Christ, with no hope and without God in the world. Where that memory holds, the money moves (Acts 4:32-35; 2 Corinthians 8). Where it fails, you get favoritism for the man with the gold ring and wages crying out from the field (James 2:1-7; 5:4). First John 3:17: if you have the world's goods and see your brother in need and shut your heart against him, how does the love of God live in you?

How it actually ended

They did not listen to the chapter.

Nehemiah 9 is the hardest witness of all, because it is Israel confessing on itself, out loud, in Moses' own words. Verses 25 and 26: they ate and were full and grew fat and delighted in Your great goodness. And then they rebelled against You and threw Your law behind their backs. The prosperity line and the rebellion line are separated by a single word.

Jeremiah 2:7 says it from God's side: I brought you into a rich land to enjoy its fruit, but you came and defiled My land. The good land was never a reward for being reliable. It was the setting where they fell.

And Deuteronomy 8:19-20 told them what would come. You will perish like the nations. Second Kings 17 records the north carried off by Assyria, and 2 Chronicles 36 records Jerusalem burned and Judah dragged

to Babylon. The land, described in all that mouth-watering detail, was lost. Not because the wilderness broke them. Because the harvest did.

Two churches, side by side

Revelation gives the clearest picture in the Bible, and it only takes ten verses. Smyrna, in 2:9: I know your suffering and your poverty, but you are rich. Laodicea, in 3:17: you say you are rich and need nothing, but you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

Both churches are wrong about themselves, in exactly opposite directions. And out of the seven churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, the two that are afflicted and weak, are the only two Jesus does not rebuke at all.

Comfort is not proof that God is pleased, and affliction is not proof that He is not. Neither church could see itself clearly. Only one of them was in danger because of it.

Living it out

This failure will not feel like backsliding. It will feel like a good season. So watch for it in ordinary places.

Prayer goes quiet, not in theory but in practice. You still believe in it. There is just nothing this week you cannot arrange, cover, or fix yourself, so it never comes up.

The story of how you got here starts to drift. Ten years ago you told it as God's mercy. Now you tell it as your discipline, your grind, your smart moves. Nothing in the new version is a lie. Something in it has just been quietly deleted.

Generosity keeps getting pushed to a line that keeps moving. You will give when the business is stable, when the house is paid down, when this quarter clears. The line was never the real issue.

The provision goes invisible. Food, work, a roof, healthy kids, a spouse who is still there. None of it registers as an answered prayer anymore, because none of it is in doubt.

And you stop being grieved. You hear about a family in your city with a real need, you file it away calmly, and you move on. Amos 6:6 is describing a muscle that stopped working.

Here is the tell. Try to remember the last time you needed something you could not buy, schedule, or fix. If nothing comes to mind fast, you are standing exactly where Deuteronomy 8:11 tells you to watch yourself.

Go deeper: prosperity, memory, and the lifted heart

- **Deuteronomy 8, all of it**, read out loud in one sitting. The structure carries the whole argument.
- **Deuteronomy 6:10-12**: the cities you did not build, and the trigger named up close.
- **Deuteronomy 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18; 24:22**: the five “you were a slave in Egypt” commands.
- **Deuteronomy 17:16-17**: the three limits on a king, written before Israel even had one.
- **Deuteronomy 26:1-11**: the firstfruits recital, said out loud right at harvest.

- **Deuteronomy 31:19-21 and 32:15:** God predicts the failure before they cross. Jeshurun grew fat and kicked.
- **Judges 2:7-13:** one generation.
- **2 Chronicles 26 and 32:25-31:** Uzziah and Hezekiah. Ask what the difference was at the end.
- **Daniel 4:28-37:** the pagan king who says verse 17 out loud and is the only one here who recovers. Ask why.
- **Ezekiel 16:49 and Amos 6:1-6:** what comfort does to compassion.
- **Hosea 13:4-6:** Deuteronomy 8 turned into a charge sheet.
- **Nehemiah 9:25-31:** Israel's confession in Moses' own words.
- **Proverbs 30:7-9:** both dangers, one prayer.

In the New Testament

- **Matthew 4:1-11:** every answer Jesus gives comes out of Deuteronomy 6 and 8. Find the three source verses first.
- **Matthew 6:19-24:** treasure, the eye, and two masters. Verse 21 makes the heart follow the treasure.
- **Mark 4:18-19 and Luke 8:14:** the deceitfulness of riches, and a soil that looks healthy the whole time.
- **Luke 12:13-21:** the running monologue of a man in the middle of it. Count the first-person pronouns.
- **Luke 16:19-31:** you already received your good things. Comfort as something already spent.
- **Luke 17:11-19:** ten healed, one came back. The nine are never accused of anything.
- **Mark 10:17-31:** and the disciples were astonished. Ask why, and what they thought wealth proved.
- **Acts 4:32-35 and 5:1-11:** what a remembering church did with its property, and the counterfeit right behind it.
- **1 Corinthians 4:7:** the whole lesson in one question.
- **1 Corinthians 10:1-13:** the wilderness written down for us. This makes the Old Testament half binding, not just illustrative.
- **2 Corinthians 8:1-9:** Macedonian poverty overflowing, and then the reason, in verse 9.
- **Ephesians 2:8-12:** no one gets to brag, and remember that you were once separate from Christ.
- **Philippians 4:11-13:** Paul had to learn abundance the same way he learned hunger. Verse 13 sits inside a paragraph about contentment.
- **1 Timothy 6:6-10 and 17-19:** what Paul actually tells the rich to do, which is not to stop being rich.
- **Hebrews 3:7-4:11:** unbelief as the thing that kept them out, aimed at the church.
- **Hebrews 13:5:** contentment resting on a promise about His presence, not His provision.
- **James 1:9-11; 2:1-7; 4:13-16; 5:1-6:** the fullest run at this theme in any single NT book.
- **1 John 3:16-18:** shuts his heart against him. Love in action and truth.
- **Revelation 2:8-11 and 3:14-22:** the two churches that could not see themselves.
- **Revelation 18:7:** the same sentence at the scale of an empire.

Your challenge this week

Write your own version of verse 17. Not the Bible's words. Yours. Finish the sentence “I have what I have because ____” and do not clean it up for church. Then hold it up next to Deuteronomy 8:18 and see what has to change.

Trace one thing back past yourself. Take one good thing you are proud of and follow it backward. Who opened the door. Who gave you the ability. Who kept you alive to use it. Keep going until you land somewhere you had nothing to do with.

Tell a hard season out loud. Pick a wilderness God carried you through and tell it, with the details, to your kids or the person you are discipling. Include what you did not have and who provided it.

Name the manna you stopped seeing. List five things God is providing right now that you have not thanked Him for in the last year because you just assume them. Thank Him for each one, by name, out loud, once a day this week.

Give something that costs you. Not spare change off the top. An amount you will actually feel on a Tuesday. Point it at someone with less power than you.

Audit your prayer list. What have you stopped asking God for because you have already arranged it yourself? That list is a map of where the test is hiding.

Read Luke 12:16-19 out loud in the first person. Say the rich fool's words as your own, slowly, and notice how normal they sound. Then read verse 20. Then ask what “rich toward God” would cost you this month.

Ask someone who knew you before. Someone who knew you when you had less. Ask them whether you talk about God differently now. Then do not argue with the answer.

The Gospel underneath it

Israel came out of Egypt, walked through forty years of bread from heaven, entered a land they did not build, ate, got full, grew fat, and forgot. That is the whole book in one sentence, and it should end the argument about whether a better attitude would have saved them. They had every advantage in the story of redemption, and it still did not hold.

Then another Israel walks into the wilderness. Forty days this time, no bread at all, and at the end the offer is laid out in its purest form: all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, handed over right now, no waiting. And He turns it down. He answers all three temptations by quoting Deuteronomy, and the very first answer comes out of Deuteronomy 8:3, this chapter, about man not living on bread alone. He passed the prosperity test with the exact words Israel was given and failed to keep.

Then He went the other direction with it. Second Corinthians 8:9: though He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that through His poverty you could become rich. He is the only one who ever had everything and did not build His identity on it.

Which is why the cure for verse 17 is not a smaller bank account. It is a brand new origin story, and He is the one who supplies it. By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, so that no one can brag. The boast in Deuteronomy 8:17 does not get managed at the cross. It gets killed there (Galatians 6:14).

And to the church that had the most and knew the least about itself, the risen Christ does not say leave. He says buy from Me gold refined in fire, and salve for your eyes so you can see. Then He stands at the door and knocks, and if anyone opens up, He will come in and eat with him. Laodicea's problem was never the wealth. It was that they had stopped needing Him and had not noticed.

Eat and be satisfied. Then bless Yahweh your God for the good land He gave you. The second half of verse 10 is not optional. It is the only thing that keeps the first half from killing you. That is the whole point of turning the credit back around while you still can.