

“Relationship by Osmosis?”—Deuteronomy 4:9

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Relationship by Osmosis?”, is Deuteronomy 4:9 → *Take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Throughout the years I’ve heard people talk about “learning by osmosis.” So I decided to look up the word “osmosis” to determine the nature of this kind of learning. Here’s the definition according to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary: “movement of a solvent through a semipermeable membrane (as of a living cell) into a solution of higher solute concentration that tends to equalize the concentrations of solute on the two sides of the membrane.” S-u-r-e. That’s what they mean when they talk about learning by osmosis? I think they’re using the word more in line with one of the other definitions provided: “a usually effortless often unconscious assimilation.” Thus, learning by osmosis would be learning **with the least amount of effort**, hoping the information would simply “absorb” into your brain.

Actually, such learning is constantly happening day by day in our

lives in the midst of our relationships. Many of your behaviors and actions have been learned by “osmosis” throughout your upbringing and family relationships. In fact, much of the knowledge which determines how you live your daily life has been “caught” by the actions of those around you, sometimes even more than taught. The challenge with “learning by osmosis”—that is, with the least effort possible—is that you may function in relationships with assumptions which may not be true and can even be detrimental to those relationships. For instance, unfortunately many parents assume their children know they love them by virtue of conception and providence but have never **told them**, “I love you.”

Likewise, the challenge with “learning by osmosis” in your relationship with the Lord is that you may function with assumptions which may not be true and can even be detrimental to your relationship with Him and even your eternal soul. Since it is so easy to take relationships for granted, Moses warned and encouraged God’s people in our text to *take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.* They were to protect their soul **diligently** by never forgetting *the things that* their eyes had seen. We have no picture here of “learning by osmosis” but rather an intentional on-going learning process.

So, what things had they seen from which they were not to *depart* . . . *all the days of* their lives? While some of them as children had witnessed the power of Yahweh in the events of His delivering them from slavery to Egypt in the Exodus, the majority of these Israelites had witnessed God's providence, along with His judgment upon their parents' disobedience, over the past forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

They had been at these borders of the Promised Land forty years earlier. Yahweh was willing to give it to them if they would trust Him and enter. Instead, filled with fabricated fear, *all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!* When Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb encouraged them to trust Yahweh and enter, *all the congregation wanted to stone them to death.* (cf. Numbers 14:2,10) It has been said: "Be careful what you ask for because you just might get it." Sure enough, God's judgment was that none of the men who had witnessed His glory and power in the Exodus would enter the Promised Land. Instead, during forty years of wandering in the wilderness their children had to watch their grandparents, parents, older siblings and cousins die. (cf. Numbers 14:20-35) All because they disobeyed the LORD.

You can well understand why Moses was so adamant to instruct this new generation about to enter the Promised Land to *take care, and keep*

their souls *diligently* and not *forget the things that their eyes had seen* in their relationship with the LORD. Instead of experiencing the blessings which the LORD wanted to continue bestowing in His gracious love they could end up forfeiting those blessings by a lack of trust in Him with disobedience to His Word, thereby bringing His righteous judgment upon themselves for the sin. Thus, they must be diligent and intentional about their faith as well as passing that faith on to their *children and their children's children*. When it comes to your relationship with the Lord, “learning by osmosis” will not “cut it.” It will endanger your soul and the souls of your children.

As with the Israelites, being intentional about your relationship with the Lord flows from living as a redeemed child of God. The Holy Spirit not only creates your relationship with God by bringing you to faith in Jesus Christ but He is also empowering you to display that relationship daily. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit's work in John 14:26. He says: *The Helper, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* However, how can He *bring to your remembrance all that* Jesus has told you if you don't read your Bible or hear His Word? Thus, you are told to *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*. Why? So that you can teach and admonish *one another in all wisdom*, and worship together by *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with*

*thankfulness in your hearts to God on the basis of that Word.* (cf. Colossians 3:16)

The Holy Spirit is working to make your relationship with Jesus affect your actions in your relationships with others. In Galatians 5:22-23 He describes this *fruit of the Spirit* as *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*. Even with these actions which are *fruit*, that is, the natural outflow of faith in Jesus which the Holy Spirit works through us, God still tells us to be intentional about our relationship with Him saying, *If we live by the Spirit, **let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*** (cf. Galatians 5:25) This happens by nurturing your faith through encountering God's Word and Sacraments daily. It is actually the lifestyle of faith.

Moses had even described this lifestyle of faith to the people who came out of the wilderness in Deuteronomy 6:5-9. Rather than living an "osmosis" family life where it is assumed that relationships and proper behavior are "intact," He told them to practice the presence of Yahweh and His Word by . . .

- . . . a complete love for the LORD. He said: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* (v. 5) This life-permeating love for the LORD is intentionally nurtured by . . .
- . . . God's Word which directs the desires of your heart . (cf. Psalm 37:4)

He said: *These words that I command you today shall be on your heart.* (v. 6) Because of your desire for the LORD you will . . .

- . . . *teach them **diligently** to your children.* (v. 7) This teaching is not simply sending them to some classes to learn information about Jesus but **using and submitting to God's Word**, allowing it to permeate your everyday home life and discussions. Thus, in your discussions you will . . .
- . . . *talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.* (v. 7) God's Word is natural to conversation in your family relationships. It is even visible in the decor of your home. He said: *You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* (v. 9)

Relationship by osmosis is actually an impossibility, whether it be your relationship with the LORD or your relationship with others. It involves intentionality. God has gone to great lengths in order to have a relationship with you as a loving, forgiving Father instead of a righteous Judge upon you and your sin. Instead of expecting you to seek out a loving relationship with Him He sought you out in your sin, took the punishment for your sin upon Himself in the Person & Work of Jesus and gives you His Holy Spirit to trust in Him as well as gift and guide you to live for Him daily. Thus, our appropriate response to hearing His Word,

revealing His love in Christ to us over and over again is, “Thanks be to God! Amen.”

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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